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Pupils' responses to foreign language learning
in the context of national concern about boys'
performance, with specific reference to single-
sex classes in co-educational schools

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for the degree of Ph.D.

at the

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Declaration

An earlier, abridged version of Chapter 1 was published in Language Learning Journal, No. 16, in September, 1997 under the title “Boys’ under-achievement in GCSE modern languages: reviewing the reasons”.

Summary

The thesis investigates pupils' approaches to learning modern foreign languages, particularly within the context of a single-sex teaching group. It represents a response to both the prevailing concern generated by the disparity between boys' and girls' achievements in this subject area, and to researchers' recommendations that the effects of a single-sex setting be investigated more closely (Powell, 1986; Batters, 1988).

The findings are based on classroom-based research which adopted a case study approach to observe the practices of five mixed comprehensive schools in the UK which taught languages to one or more segregated cohort for at least one academic year. The data is predominantly qualitative and was collected over a period of two years by the following means: group and individual interviews; a range of questionnaires; classroom observation; and informal discussions with pupils and staff.

The thesis begins by contextualising the issue of boys' underachievement in modern foreign languages. The first two chapters undertake a review and analysis of relevant research findings relating to both the reasons for boys' underachievement and the single-sex schooling debate. Chapter 3 describes the methods adopted by the researcher and outlines the central features of the five schools.

The empirical findings of the research are analysed in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. Chapters 4 and 5 address generic language teaching and learning issues; Chapter 4 focuses on teaching and learning styles and Chapter 5 examines pupils' attitudes to modern foreign languages. Chapters 6 and 7 focus more specifically on the observed effects of single-sex grouping, exploring the pupils' and teachers' perceptions respectively.

Chapter 8 draws conclusions from the findings and makes recommendations for further research.

In bringing together qualitative data from multiple sources, the thesis gives original and comprehensive insight into an area which is currently of considerable national and political interest. The findings suggest that boys' often negative attitudes to the subject are informed by a complex myriad of variables, including: the perceived relevance and difficulty of the subject; individual personality; learning preferences; the pupils' socio-economic background; and the teaching style. Where single-sex setting is perceived as an important influence on pupils' motivation and performance, it is usually recognised to be operating in conjunction with these other variables.

Abbreviations

‘A’ level = Advanced level

BAQTS = Bachelor of Arts with Qualified Teacher Status

CSE = Certificate of Secondary Education

FE = Further Education

GCSE = General Certificate of Secondary Education

GIST = Girls Into Science and Technology

HMI = Her Majesty’s Inspectors

IT = Information Technology

ICT = Information and Communications Technology

INSET = In-service Education and Training

LEA = Local Education Authority

‘O’ level = Ordinary level

Ofsted = Office for Standards in Education

QCA = Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Introduction

The academic underachievement of boys in secondary education

The term 'boys' underachievement' has only recently become integrated into governmental, public and pedagogic discourses. Its frequent usage denotes considerable concern at the relative underperformance of boys, most notably at secondary school level, but also with regard to literacy in infant education. This concern has grown steadily since the introduction of GCSE examinations in 1988, with girls outperforming boys in the majority of subjects, most notably in the traditionally boy-dominated areas of maths, science and technology.

Awareness of the disparity between boys' and girls' academic achievements has been heightened by two educational reforms. These formed part of a batch of reforms first implemented by the Conservative government in the early 1990s, ostensibly to inform parental choice: the publication of examination league tables; and mandatory school inspections conducted by the statutory body, Ofsted. Both reforms have encouraged schools to focus their attention more closely on pupils' examination performance. In a political environment which encourages them to compete with their neighbours, schools are under considerable pressure to improve the performance of pupils who are perceived to be underachieving. As government statistics and Ofsted reports indicate, these pupils are most likely to be male.

The gap between boys' and girls' achievements at the age of fifteen/sixteen appears to have increased steadily over the past few years. In 1987, the final year of 'O' level and CSE examinations, 1.6% more girls than boys gained five or more passes at A-C grade; in 1990 the difference was 7.6%, and in 1995 9.1% (SCAA, 1996, p. 8-9). Boys' relative underperformance at this stage seems to reflect further problems in other

educational and social areas: boys are over-represented in school disciplinary procedures and exclusions (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1996, p. 143); they are more likely to be identified as having special educational needs than their female peers (Bleach, 1998, p.5); the number of male juveniles convicted for committing criminal offences far exceeds the number of females (Office for National Statistics, 1997); and the unemployment rate amongst young males is much higher than amongst young females (ibid).

Such findings have produced a frenzy of media interest and research activity which has not been welcomed by all educationists and academics. The re-direction of research focus, from the prevailing concern in the early eighties surrounding girls' underachievement in traditionally male dominated subjects such as mathematics, science and technology, to a new interest in the field of masculinities and boy-friendly pedagogies, has alarmed many, especially feminist academics. They argue that the "globalized moral panic" (Epstein et al, 1998, p. 3), instigated by reports of the gender imbalance, threatens to marginalize girls in the classroom, nullifying much of the successful work undertaken by their colleagues to raise girls' achievement, and profile, in classrooms in the 1980s. They also point to an inherent bias in media coverage of the issue which has tended to problematize girls' success, depicting boys as the victims of their female counterparts (Skelton, 1997; Epstein et al, 1998).

Such cogent arguments present considerable grounds for concern, not least for teachers who are under significant pressure to raise, or maintain, the league table status of their school without disadvantaging female pupils. Over-usage of the term 'boys' underachievement' may also have caused many to disregard a number of important considerations which should accompany any systematic, gender-centred research, if the temptation of crude generalisation is to be avoided. Certain caveats, listed below,

should be heeded in any discussion of the phenomenon of boys' underachievement, since its symptoms and causes may vary widely.

- Contrary to the implicit message of much media coverage, the underachievement of boys is by no means a new phenomenon. Newspapers in the early 1980s carried headlines and stories which resemble closely reports of the last few years. This point has also been underlined by the recent revelation that positive discrimination was exercised in some local authorities' allocation of grammar school places in the 1960s. Since girls significantly outperformed boys in the eleven-plus exam which secured entry to grammar schools, the entrance standards were relaxed for boys to ensure equal representation of the sexes (Bleach, 1998, p. 5).
- The term 'underachievement' does not accurately describe boys' academic progress over the last twenty years, given that both boys' and girls' examination results have been steadily improving, particularly since the introduction of GCSE. The difference in achievement is related to the rate at which these improvements have taken place: girls' results have improved at a much faster rate than boys' (Bleach, 1998, p. xiv; Francis, 1998, p. 165).
- Underachievement is by no means restricted to boys alone. Girls, it seems, are still significantly outperformed by boys in certain subject areas, particularly in further and higher education. More men than women, for instance, obtain first-class degrees, and go on to higher degrees (Epstein et al, 1998, p. 11).
- It is grossly inaccurate to assume that it is all boys who are underachieving. We should be wary of regarding boys as a homogenous group (Bleach, 1998, p. 1). A small number of far-reaching and insightful studies have concluded both that there

are many diverse expressions of masculinity, and that male identity is not as immutable a phenomenon as earlier sex role theories might have us believe, but is expressed in a variety of different ways (see, for instance, Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1996).

- Variables other than the sex of the pupil may exercise equal, or greater, influence over pupil attainment, most notably ethnicity and social class. It has been claimed, for instance, that Afro-Caribbean boys generally achieve at half the rate of white boys (Gipps, 1997) and that the socio-economic background of pupils is a significant determinant in their academic success (Harris, Nixon & Rudduck, 1993; Plummer, 1998), an argument discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.
- Boys are not underachieving in all schools and at all educational levels. Chapter 2 explores this first point further, by comparing the GCSE results of boys taught in boys' schools with those of their peers attending co-educational schools, while the second point is discussed further below.

Boys' underachievement in foreign language learning

While girls' outstanding GCSE success may have surprised some teachers of traditionally boy-dominated subjects such as mathematics, science and technology, teachers of foreign languages in secondary schools may have been the least surprised by recent examination results, having been forced to grow accustomed to a disparity in results visible in the course of the previous three decades. The longevity of the problem in foreign languages is evident in the title of one academic publication, Under-achievement in foreign language learning, which echoes contemporary concerns but was published in 1963 (Pimsleur et al, 1963, in Burstall, 1974).

The scale of the current disparity in foreign languages is immediately evident in a comparison of boys' and girls GCSE results in French in 1997, illustrated in Figure I. While the inclusion of modern foreign languages in the National Curriculum has inevitably increased the take-up by boys and girls, girls outperform boys, notably at the top end of the grade range; in 1997 55% of girls, compared with 42% of boys, achieved an A*-C grade. 'A' level statistics present a rather different picture, however, as shown in Figure II. Boys' examination performance at 'A' level marginally surpasses the girls', with a greater proportion of boys gaining A-C, and A-E, passes. This contrast between GCSE and 'A' level results is not uncommon in other subjects and has been labelled the 'cross-over effect' (Gipps, 1997). There is, however, a clear reason for its emergence in modern languages, namely the difference in the number of entries by sex; in this year, the number of girls entered for French 'A' level was just over twice the number of boys. This leads one to the reasonable assumption that male 'A' level entrants represent the most proficient male GCSE students, boys whose motivation may also have been boosted by a conscious desire to succeed in spite of peer pressure on them to opt out, a supposition explored in greater depth in Chapter 1.

While boys' apparent success at 'A' level must, therefore, be viewed in context, such figures nevertheless serve to illustrate that boys' cognitive development does not necessarily preclude their linguistic success. They contest the dangerous notion of "the fiction of the boy's potential" (Cohen, 1996) in a curriculum area which has much to offer to those boys whose underdeveloped communicative and social skills, described in Chapter 1, may lead to the formation of unsatisfactory, and sometimes violent, interactions and relationships.

FIGURE I

GCSE Entries and Achievements of 15 year old pupils in all schools in French by end of 1996/97

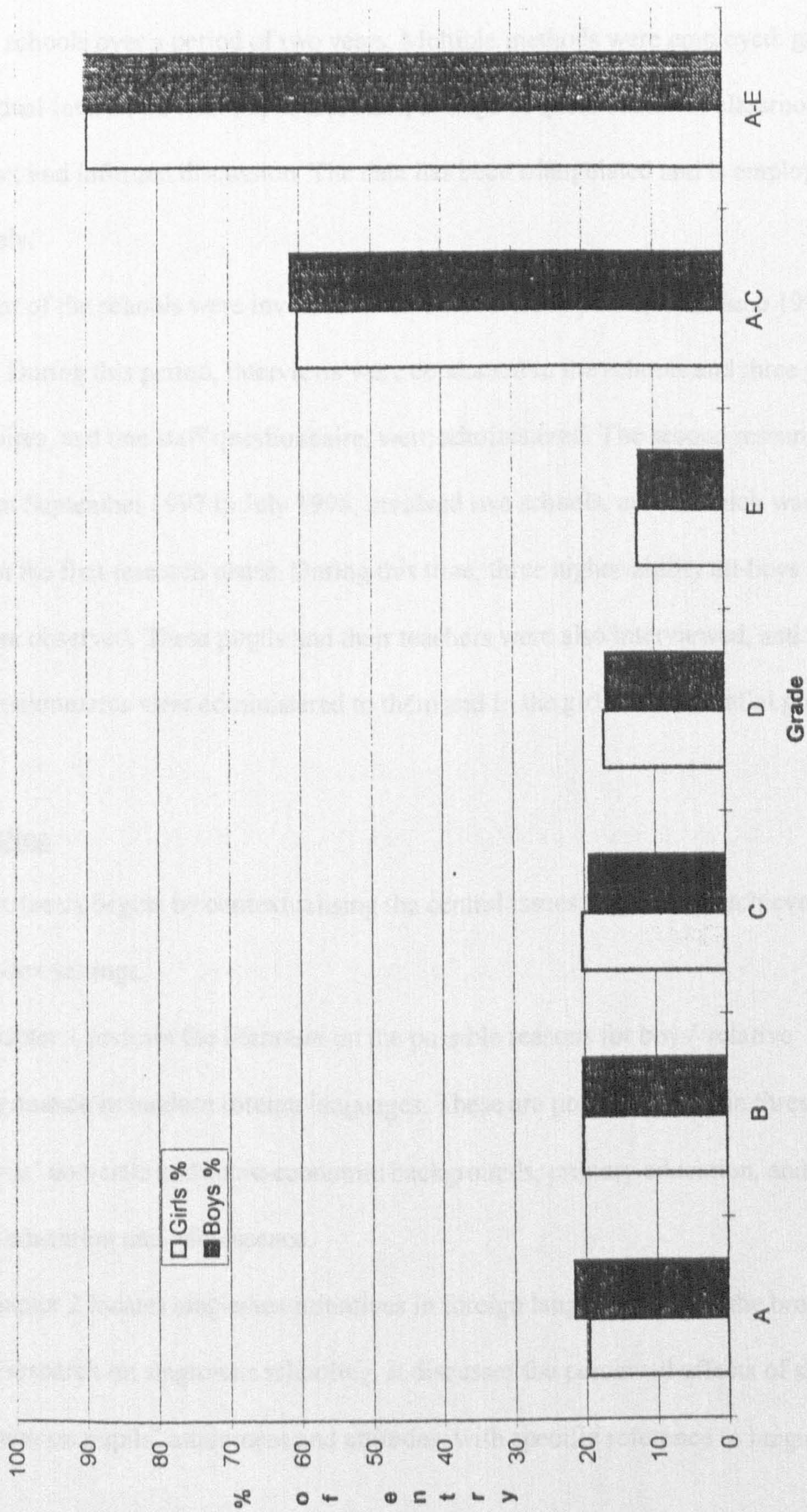
Number of entries: Girls 162,273 Boys 143,782



FIGURE II

GCE 'A' Level Entries and Achievements of 17 year old candidates in all schools and FE Colleges by end of 1996/97

Number of entries: Girls 15,645 Boys 6,858



Research outline

The research involved collecting qualitative and quantitative data from five case study schools over a period of two years. Multiple methods were employed: group and individual interviews with pupils and staff; a range of questionnaires; classroom observation; and informal discussion. The data has been triangulated and is employed descriptively.

Four of the schools were involved in the first research phase, from June 1996 to July 1997. During this period, interviews were conducted in the schools and three pupil questionnaires, and one staff questionnaire, were administered. The second research phase, from September 1997 to July 1998, involved two schools, one of which was also involved in the first research phase. During this time, three higher-ability all-boys groups were observed. These pupils and their teachers were also interviewed, and two further questionnaires were administered to them and to the girls in the parallel group.

Thesis outline

The thesis begins by contextualising the central issues: boys' underachievement and single-sex settings.

Chapter 1 reviews the literature on the possible reasons for boys' relative underperformance in modern foreign languages. These are positioned within three fields: pupils' domestic and socio-economic backgrounds, primary education, and secondary education and adolescence.

Chapter 2 locates single-sex initiatives in foreign languages within the broader context of research on single-sex schooling. It discusses the perceived effects of single-sex education on pupils' attainment and attitudes, with specific reference to languages.

It also describes single-sex initiatives implemented to achieve other objectives, such as raising awareness of gender, and initiatives in other subjects.

Chapter 3 describes the methods and instruments employed to carry out the study. It outlines the research schedule and relates the main features of each of the five schools involved.

Chapter 4 focuses on teaching and learning styles. It begins by describing the development of the current dominant teaching model, communicative language teaching, and goes on to consider boys' responses to a range of classroom activities. It also considers the importance of variables relating to the teaching and learning environment, such as the role of the teacher, class size and ability setting.

Chapter 5 examines pupils' attitudes to modern foreign languages. A range of affective variables are considered, including contact with native speakers abroad and the perceived importance and relevance of language learning.

Chapter 6 describes pupils' experiences and views of being taught modern foreign languages in a single-sex class for one year. Some comparisons are drawn with the attitudes of their peers in mixed groups.

Chapter 7 analyses teachers' perceptions of pupils' attitudes, learning behaviours and performance in the subject. Comparisons are drawn between the perceptions of those teachers responsible for single-sex groups and those teaching only mixed groups. Discrepancies between the perceptions of pupils and teachers are highlighted.

Chapter 8 extrapolates general conclusions from the findings and makes recommendations for good practice and for further research.

Chapter 1

Possible reasons for boys' underachievement in foreign languages: a literature review

1. Introduction

Harris, Nixon and Rudduck have described young people as,

“...caught in overlapping gender regimes - the regime of the community, the regime of the peer culture and the regime of the school.”

(Harris, Nixon & Rudduck, 1993, p. 5)

This chapter explores the possible reasons why large numbers of boys fail to realise their full potential in foreign languages by investigating how their position within, and their reactions to, home, school and society may influence their perspective and performance in the subject. The focus of the chapter is primarily on sociological and methodological reasons; it sets out from the premise that boys' attitudes and approaches to language learning are shaped by numerous external influences which inform their socialisation. It does not discuss in any detail the 'biological' arguments favoured by some sections of the media, which seek to explain differences in linguistic aptitude by emphasising physiological, hormonal and neurological differences between males and females (see, for instance, Kohn, 1995; Marrin, 1997; Moir, 1998). There are three reasons for this: first, media coverage of this kind of biological research endeavours to engage human interest by glossing over significant, complex details, in order to create 'black and white' articles and programmes which appeal to large audiences by being both simplistic and sometimes sensationalist. Second, it would appear that scientists have yet to reach a consensus on their findings regarding

linguistic aptitude; this field of research is characterised by considerable inconsistencies and contradictions. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the media dissemination of such theories often seems to confuse learning styles with abilities. The tendency to generalise in such reports often results in a failure to distinguish between ability, which has inherent limitations, and learning style, which can be developed and adapted. Most learners, it should be remembered, select from a range of learning styles, according to which is deemed most appropriate in the circumstances (Head, 1996). To accept the argument that boys are not biologically predisposed to learning languages would be both defeatist and destructive, since it would involve imposing restrictive boundaries on boys' potential for developing their interactional and communicative skills.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section examines the influence of pupils' domestic and socio-economic background: parental role models and expectations of their children, and the part played by family income in shaping pupils' perceptions.

The second section focuses on the way in which infant education may encourage differentiation between the sexes, and reinforce pupils' differential perspectives on accepted school behaviours, and language and literacy.

The third section examines the area of secondary education and the experience of adolescence, focusing initially on a range of variables which may mould pupils' attitudes and influence their linguistic attainment: the image of foreign languages; self-awareness and peer pressure; ethnocentricity; reactions to different languages, and the lesson content. The second part of the section focuses on the role played by secondary school staff: their expectations of pupils; differentiation; the sex of the teacher; and careers guidance.

This chapter provides a relatively brief review of researchers' findings on these issues. Given the sparsity of research in the field of foreign language teaching and learning, much of the research is not related specifically to languages. Many of the issues raised here formed the basis of school-based enquiry in the research project and are explored in much greater detail in later sections of the thesis.

1.1 Parental influence in infancy

Parents' gender-specific expectations of children are often expressed from the moment their child is born, both consciously and sub-consciously. Even the names that children are given express certain expectations of a character that will be shaped by awareness of its sex; girls' names tend to be polysyllabic and pretty, while boys' names are often short and hard-hitting (Delamont, 1990, p. 14-15). The kinds of language employed by parents in interaction with their children, the way in which they dress them, and the way in which they play with them may all contribute to the child's awareness of appropriate engendered behaviours (Askew & Ross, 1988).

Many parents openly encourage behaviour that is an indication of their child's gender, expecting a male baby to cry loudly and frequently and a female to be more subdued, demands which are, interestingly, later reversed by encouraging boys to suppress their emotions. Boys are often expected to be noisy, dirty and adventurous, while girls are supposed to be passive, tidy and dependent on others. These characteristics are nurtured by the kinds of toys children are given. Boys' toys - for instance, cars, building kits and mechanical 'transforming' robots - foster manual dexterity, creativity and spatial ability. Girls' toys, by contrast, are largely resemblant of human or animal life - dolls, ponies, soft toys, hairdressing models - or else domestic appliances - ironing boards, cookers, washing machines and vacuum cleaners (Burn,

1989). A cursory glance at the packaging of toys produced by most of the large companies will reveal, quite blatantly, not only the age range but also the sex for which the toy is intended. As Wilkinson and Marrett have suggested (1985, p. 6) such toys encourage differential learning styles: in boys, independence, exploration and problem solving; in girls, the desire for approval, imitation and rule-learning. If we consider the prerequisites for language learning, it also becomes clear that girls' toys, promoting human contact and communication, may give them an immediate advantage over boys.

Some parents would, of course, argue that such division of behaviour is 'only natural' and that, given the choice, girls and boys would still select toys regarded as appropriate for their own sex. To prove this one would have to remove all external sources of pressure - the media, advertising, parents, peers and teachers - which is, of course, impossible. Burn's survey of children's play would, however, seem to corroborate the claim until one reads that the six year-old girls happily admitting their lack of interest in Lego also confess that their earlier desires to play with it had been thwarted by the boys (Burn, 1989).

1.1.1 Parental role models and social class

The influence of role models in the home is not to be underestimated given their usual predominance in the child's life from the first moment of consciousness. Many parents continue to conform to traditional, stereotypical roles: the male figure is often practical, undertaking D.I.Y., car repairs and going out to work daily; the female figure may prepare the meals, look after the children and work part-time in administration or retail. While this stereotypical picture may be fading, one cannot deny its continuing validity, especially, perhaps, in lower-income homes. Several researchers have highlighted the effects of low family income and social class on

pupils' general academic attainment, which become more marked with the progression of their school careers (Willis, 1977; Harris, Nixon & Rudduck, 1993; Sammons, 1995). In a survey of six and seven, and eight and nine, year-olds, Short and Carrington found a pronounced difference in the stereotyped perceptions of working and middle-class school pupils (Short & Carrington, 1989). When presented with a series of pictures showing a woman driving and repairing a car, virtually all of the 'Workington' pupils needed no prompting in order to spot something unusual, while just under half of the 'Middleton' pupils remained unaware of anything out of the ordinary until prompted.

Little has been written on the effects of class on foreign language learning, but this sort of experiment seems to underline its importance in terms of shaping children's views of appropriate behaviours and learning styles for their sex. If children are exposed to blatant differentiation for most of their first four years of life it is hardly surprising that their expectations of the sexes will be prejudiced, as a 'Workington' pupil, Ben, makes clear:

"Women are meant to sit down and use their brains and men run around."

(op. cit., p. 32)

It is of interest that, in interviews with the researcher, pupils often explained that their selection of one language as opposed to another had been based on a parent's viewpoint or contact with that language, underlining the role played by the parent in determining pupils' views of foreign languages.

1.2 Primary education

While Wilkinson and Marrett observed some time ago that nursery schools tend to be more gender-orientated than other schools (1985, p. 120), Francis has recently described the way in which primary schools actively contribute to children's dichotomous constructions of gender (Francis, 1998). Rose describes how, as a mother actively engaged in educating her son to be "different from the stereotypical male norm", she found her egalitarian practices rapidly undermined by primary school:

"Within six months of starting school my child had abandoned the term 'fire fighter' for 'fireman'. He told me that I was not capable of rescuing him in play, as women had not got any muscles...! I can no longer be referred to as Dr. Rose when administering sticking plaster, but am henceforth to be addressed as 'nurse', despite the presence of a female general practitioner at our local health centre."

(Rose, 1989, p. 15)

Children in primary school are, it seems, acutely aware of gender differences, often reinforced by formal differentiation in the register, the playground, the cloakroom, the dining room and in disciplinary strategies (Delamont, 1990, p. 27). In Francis's survey of 145 primary school pupils, their response to the suggestion that boys and girls behaved differently was overwhelmingly positive: in response to the question, "Do boys and girls behave differently in class or not?", 95% of the girls and 75% of the boys answered in the affirmative (Francis, 1998, p. 32).

1.2.1 Communicative skills and literacy

Parents' and teachers' gender-differentiated interactions with children may also, of course, contribute to their use of language. Wilkinson and Marrett (1985) cite a study carried out by Fagot in 1977 which revealed that while teachers tended to join in with boys' play, their interactions with girls were more verbal. Whether or not primary teachers are responsible for making such distinctions, there is still a clear difference in boys' and girls' verbal and written use of language. Girls' language skills, it seems, may develop more quickly than boys': in 1995, 83% of girls at Key Stage 1 were performing at the 'expected level', National Curriculum Level 2, or above, compared with 73% of boys (Arnot et al, 1996, p.4). Some researchers have suggested that the dearth of male primary school teachers is responsible for boys' devaluation of reading and writing, skills which they associate with female primary teachers (Millard, 1997, p. 28; Bleach, 1998, p. 10).

Askew and Ross, in their observation of young boys in the 1980s, found that communication amongst them was very often physical, a punch or a push substituting a greeting. They back up their observation with a description of the situation in a Colorado classroom of nine year-olds:

"In practically every case, the boys ignored each other as people. They displayed no personal curiosity. They did not look at each other's faces. They didn't ask personal questions. They didn't volunteer information about themselves. Conversation was confined to the technical problems of Lego design. In every essential respect, the boys stayed solitary and played by themselves."

(Hodson, 1984, in Askew & Ross, 1988, p. 24)

The recent publication of American psychologist Tannen, on men's and women's differing conversational styles, seems to indicate that a peculiarly male style continues into adult life and is as symptomatic of the 1990s as the 1980s (Tannen, 1995). Her observation has revealed that men's talk is dominated by the phenomenon of maintaining superiority, illustrated through apologising or praising far less readily than women. Similarly, Askew and Ross were aware of boys' unwillingness to listen to others; boys' responses to others often took the form of a challenge, contradiction or derision (op.cit., p. 36). Reconstructing this raw material into able and willing communicators in a native language, let alone in a foreign language, will obviously make great demands on secondary school teachers.

1.3 Secondary education and adolescence

Taking into account these early years of role conditioning, it may be anticipated that primary school boys would be less motivated in foreign language learning than girls. Adolescence and the increased self-awareness that accompanies it often results in a polarisation of pupils' attitudes in secondary school. Diligence in foreign language learning in the secondary school may be considered 'unmanly' and 'uncool' by a large number of boys for a variety of discernible, but often disputed, reasons.

1.3.1 Self-awareness, 'image' and peer pressure

In their seminal study of psychological research published in 1975, The Psychology of Sex Differences, Maccoby and Jacklin come to the conclusion that boys are more susceptible to peer pressure than girls, and this view has been perpetuated by many researchers since. Willis's study of working-class boys found that they frequently subjected the 'ear 'oles', passive, conformist boys, to verbal and physical taunting

(Willis, 1977), while researchers working in the field more recently have concluded that resistance to school represents a means of defining one's masculinity:

“... for some boys, resisting the opportunity to work in class is a way of asserting their masculine assertiveness vis-à-vis the teacher...”

(Harris et al, 1993, p. 7)

“For most [boys], schooling is far from being an empowering experience.

They encounter school authority as an alien power and start to define their masculinity against it.”

(Connell, 1995, p. 100)

Boys, then, appear to think that academic success is “sad”, and that image is all-important (Hofkins, 1995). The appearance of diligence is to be avoided at all costs and it is seen as clever to boast of not having prepared for a test. While boys may want to achieve success in class, efforts must be made to preserve one's status in the peer group by appearing uninterested in academic work (Williams, 1995). Disaffection such as this is bound to have serious implications for all schoolwork, but it may have particularly serious consequences in a subject which makes excessive demands on pupils' concentration and commitment, and in which success is gained through the steady accumulation, rather than the discovery, of a body of knowledge.

In the classroom itself, peer pressure may result in a sense of insecurity which can express itself through disruptive behaviour. Bearing in mind Tannen's theory of the male needing to occupy the superior position in dialogue (Tannen, 1995), male adolescents will, no doubt, find it much more difficult than females to relinquish their hold on their primary means of communication and expose their breaking voices, thereby inviting their peers' ridicule. Hawkins has underlined the fact that boys are less willing than girls to suspend disbelief (Hawkins, 1987, p. 257). The requirements of

GCSE and any language course are such that role-play is unavoidable, and this can, of course, contribute to boys' dismissal of language learning as 'artificial' and 'make-believe' - an assumption which will be reinforced as soon as they leave the room to be swept back into the "gale of English" (op. cit., p. 97) that dominates the remaining twenty-three hours of the day.

1.3.2 The image of foreign languages and subject stereotyping

A number of researchers have attributed boys' lack of success in foreign languages to its female associations. Stables and Wikeley, for instance, re-assert pupils' highly gendered preferences for subjects:

"...there is still evidence of some gender patterning in choices, with girls appearing to favour subjects involving direct personal interaction..."

(in Paechter, 1998, p. 27)

The claim that foreign languages is regarded as a feminine subject is not, however, universally accepted. A questionnaire distributed by Batters in 1983 to 953 pupils at the beginning of their second year revealed that boys did not consider girls to be superior language learners and that they regarded languages as equally important (Batters, 1988). A survey of the same pupils one year later, after they had selected their options, disclosed broadly similar results, with pupils admitting that they had not considered the femininity factor when opting for a language (p. 134). In the same year, Powell and Littlewood reported having found that the majority of Year 9 pupils in two comprehensive schools did not see French as a girls' subject (1983), while the well-known HMI investigation into boys and modern languages in 1983 found large numbers of boys enjoying the experience of learning a foreign language (HMI, 1985).

The subject image may, of course, be defined by features other than those associated with gender. Powell, for instance, describes the low status of languages in this country which, he claims, is marked by its geographical and psychological insularity (1986, p.210). Other researchers have underlined the distinction drawn by boys between 'real work', as an activity which has a tangible end-product, such as writing, and 'non-work' which comprises talk-related tasks (Askew & Ross, 1988, p. 40; Harris et al, 1993, p. 7). The high content of such spoken activities in foreign languages may cause it to be regarded by many boys as a non-serious subject.

1.3.3 Ethnocentricity

Unlike other subjects, the central objective of language learning is direct contact with people, people belonging to a different culture or race. Successful linguists must express both empathy with their models, and the desire to be able to communicate with them. Thinking back to the solitary boys on the Colorado playground who ignored each other as people and "displayed no personal curiosity" (Askew & Ross, 1988, p. 24) it is unlikely that empathy with other peoples will figure highly on a male adolescent's agenda. Both Morris (1978) and Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) have observed that boys are far more ethnocentric, and girls far more positive towards foreigners. In adolescence, this ethnocentricity often intensifies as self-confidence decreases and the need to identify with one's peers subsequently increases.

1.3.4 Reactions to different languages

This apathy towards other races seems to be applied, however, in varying degrees to different nationalities, determined by such factors as their history, media

image and cultural interest, and there is an interesting divergence of boys' and girls' attitudes. Observing six secondary schools over a period of three years, Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) found that German and Spanish learners were achieving higher scores, and showed much more positive attitudes to learning than French students. Traditionally, German has a masculine image, an idea confirmed by one of their female subjects:

“I'd much rather learn French as German is a more masculine language than French.”

(Phillips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993, p. 93)

Most research has shown, however, that 'gender-image' is not the main reason for boys preferring German. According to Pritchard's findings, pupils have to be pushed to equate a language with one sex and, interestingly, more girls than boys in her survey regarded French as effeminate (Pritchard, 1987). The principal factor in determining preference appears to be the perception of the language's difficulty and usefulness. In the infancy of learning, German is unequivocally easier than French because of its similarity with English (Phillips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993). By the third year of learning, Spanish has overtaken both French and German in terms of accessibility, its considerable advantage being its grammatical consistency (ibid). Many boys, nevertheless, find the 'guttural' pronunciation of German more accessible at a time when voice-breaking can exacerbate the difficulties experienced with the more delicate Romance languages (ibid). Pritchard (op. cit.) has underlined a second benefit in that German, like English, is a 'stress-timed' language, stressing the first syllable in speech, while French is a 'syllable-timed' language, emphasising the last syllable.

In light of the practical foundations of boys' socialization, their evaluation of the usefulness of a language should be highly influential in their enjoyment of it.

Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) found that, even by the difficult stage of the third year, boys still saw German as more useful than French or Spanish. Their German learners viewed it as particularly important in industry and commerce, whereas French and Spanish students were more inclined to think of their subjects as being useful for holidays or foreign travel (ibid.). This is not surprising given that males, traditionally the breadwinners, have always been encouraged to plan their careers, a relatively new concept for many females. Recent events in the business world, with the arrival of some major German companies in Britain, should bolster the language's popularity even more. In any case, the argument for introducing languages other than French into the curriculum is strong, and Phillips' and Filmer-Sankey's resounding comment throws a completely new light on the whole issue of the imbalance of the sexes:

“The boys’ preference for German and Spanish over French may account for the fact that girls appeared to be more positive than boys about languages generally, as higher proportions of pupils in the sample were learning French than were learning German or Spanish.”

(1993, p.104)

One wonders whether the imbalance in achievement would have arisen had German or Spanish the unrivalled prominence of French in our schools.

1.3.5 Lesson content

1.3.5.1 Literacy skills

Competence in foreign language learning is, to a considerable extent, dependent on pupils' mastery of literacy skills, an area in which boys often fall behind in secondary school (Ofsted, 1993). Some researchers have, furthermore, argued that both sexes regard reading and writing as feminine and passive (see, for instance, Shaw,

1995; Millard, 1997). Many boys, it seems, do not enjoy reading fiction to the same extent as girls, but prefer to read non-fictional texts such as manuals, magazines, newspapers and reviews (SCAA, 1996). Most GCSE foreign language textbooks appear to have addressed this preference by incorporating more fact-based surveys, newspaper and magazine articles. There are also very few modern texts which can now be criticised for stereotypical content, such as pictures of women in language-related careers (see Abraham, 1995). This divergence in boys' and girls' interests does, however, need to be borne in mind by staff when acquiring the foreign language library which is required to comply with the National Curriculum's requirements that pupils select reading material and read independently (DFE, 1995); texts which do not accommodate boys' interests are likely to be highly demotivating. Dependency on outdated, stereotypical textbooks, and difficulty in locating, or affording, a library which appeals to both sexes may contribute to boys' lack of interest in reading and writing in the foreign language.

1.3.5.2 Communicative skills

In offering pupils numerous opportunities to speak, foreign language learning may appeal to boys' interests and strengths. Powell and Littlewood's findings in 1983 that speaking activities in French were unpopular with both sexes have not been reflected in more recent findings. Batters (1988), Aplin (1991), and Graham and Rees (1995) concur that boys find oral activities one of the most enjoyable exercises. Powell's and Littlewood's observation of secondary school pupils was also in direct conflict with the HMI team's discovery, around the same time, that oral work was regarded as the most popular activity (HMI, 1985).

While boys' verbal aptitude in classrooms is now well-documented - Luke, for instance, claims that boys' spoken contributions in class exceed girls' by a ratio of 3:1 (in Paechter, 1998, p. 24) - the situation in language classrooms may nonetheless offer something of a contrast. Sunderland's study of pupil-teacher talk in modern language classrooms revealed that girls in a mixed ability Year 7 group were verbally dominant, and she emphasises that the teacher did not regard this class as exceptional (Sunderland, 1998). The suggestion that boys may lack confidence in speaking a foreign language is supported by the admission of one male pupil:

"Boys stutter more, they don't like talking in different languages. Girls are better."

(Williams, 1995)

Where there is a relative lack of confidence, which may increase with age, it may be exacerbated by the kinds of speaking tasks which boys are required to undertake in lessons. Tannen has highlighted the male tendency to avoid dialogue which indicates vulnerability, citing men's comparative reluctance to ask for directions or help. If this is the case, it casts doubt on the usefulness of spending hours of class time poring over maps, listening to recorded directions and guiding blindfolded children around the classroom in order to locate the town hall. While personal experience suggests that such a topic may excite reasonable interest in both sexes, as it opens up a variety of teaching strategies, it is nevertheless worth considering how many fourteen year-old boys would recognise the value of being taught how to find a building not usually frequented by their age group.

1.3.5.3 Aural skills

It should be remembered that language learning demands more of children's aural discrimination and comprehension skills than any other school subject, and that boys are generally acknowledged to have inferior aural skills (Shaw, 1995, p. 75). It is in order to address this deficiency that Hawkins (1987) proposes the introduction of 'language awareness' programmes into the primary school curriculum. Such programmes would prepare children for language learning in the secondary school by giving them an 'insight into pattern' and sharpening their aural and predictive skills. Hawkins identifies the children of parents who spend little time talking to them as those most in need of such a programme; this might also be extended to include boys whose home background enforces stereotypical norms. In this sort of environment, 'real' boys are not necessarily taught to sit still and listen, but to learn through doing, by racing around searching for the next 'hands-on' experience. Given this background, it is, perhaps, hardly surprising that teachers complain of boys' inability to concentrate on extended listening tasks.

1.3.6 The role of the teacher

As numerous researchers have now outlined, teachers' interactions with, and expectations of, their pupils, along with their teaching style, may have a significant effect on pupils' achievements (see, for instance, Barber, 1996; Clark & Trafford, 1996). Multifarious variables may influence this relationship; a few of these are examined below. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explore these, and others, in depth.

1.3.6.1 'Pupil talk' V 'teacher talk'

Having established that boys had a largely negative attitude to all aspects of language learning apart from oral work, Batters then discovered that more than half the lessons she observed in a secondary school were spent listening to the teacher (Batters, 1988). This evidence, along with the results of the HMI study (1985), seems to suggest that many boys, in particular, may be demotivated by lessons which are dominated by 'teacher talk' as opposed to 'pupil talk'.

A research project undertaken by four modern languages departments in schools in Cleveland set out to act on findings that 'teacher talk' was dominating 'pupil talk' in the classroom by giving pupils more speaking opportunities (Peck, 1990). The participating teachers found that through providing a variety of speaking opportunities and relaxing their own insistence on accuracy they produced boys who, it was claimed, had "a better accent" and who were more inclined to take role-play seriously. As the project was not set up specifically in order to target male underachievement, it is interesting to note that boys enjoyed the greater benefit, eventually matching the girls in their contributions in lessons. This result seems to echo the verdict of the HMI team on a school which they considered to be teaching boys successfully:

"It is not so much a question of boys responding differently from girls but of their having more opportunities than is usually the case to use the foreign language and of their ready response to these opportunities."

(HMI, 1985, p. 15)

1.3.6.2 Teacher expectations

Given that teachers themselves grew up in a sex-stereotypical society, and possibly in an era when differentiation was more blatant, we might also expect to see some evidence of biased teacher expectations and treatment of their language pupils. Most researchers seem to acknowledge that there are more similarities than differences in the teaching styles of male and female teachers, and that teachers respond to their pupils' behaviour rather than to their sex (Wilkinson & Marrett, 1985; Powell and Batters, 1986; Mifsud, 1993). The HMI report (1985) corroborated this, finding that discrimination played no part in the teaching of modern languages in 1983. This seems a little surprising given our highly gender-structured society; we ought, perhaps, to distinguish between passive and active, unconscious and conscious, discrimination. Even in the comparatively enlightened year of 1991, Sikes, a teacher educator, found that her first-year BAQTS students had alarmingly stereotypical expectations of their primary pupils: most expected boys to be cheeky, noisy and naughty, and girls to be tidy, quiet and obedient (Sikes, 1991).

A significant discrepancy between teachers' expectations of pupils' views, and their actual perceptions, was discovered by Powell and Batters in 1986. They observed a striking difference in pupils' and teachers' perceptions of foreign languages as a feminine subject: while 86.6% of all pupils at the end of their third year saw it neither as a boys' or girls' subject, 42% of teachers thought that pupils do see languages as being more appropriate for females. This sort of misguided expectation is bound to reflect, to some degree, on the teaching style; in the worst possible scenario, teachers will focus their attention on the girls, assuming that the boys will not be interested in continuing their study of a feminine subject. Sunderland's study of pupils' verbal

contributions in the languages classroom, albeit small-scale, seems to lend some support to this theory: while the girls in the Year 7 class received less of the teacher's attention, her interaction with them was characterised by a far greater proportion of academically challenging questions than she addressed to the boys in the group (Sunderland, 1998).

1.3.6.3 Differentiation

While the HMI team seemed content with schools claiming, and seeming to prove, that boys and girls “received similar treatment” (op.cit, 1985) the question arises whether the imbalance in the sexes is at least partially due to this practice. It is clear that by the time adolescents reach secondary school they will have experienced all kinds and levels of discrimination and conditioning, which will inevitably have influenced their personalities, outlooks and learning styles. Perhaps it is a mistake of the teacher to pretend to ignore these differences in teaching both sexes in the same way. Hawkins, for example, highlights the fact that boys and girls may have different memory systems - while adolescent girls allegedly possess superior semantic memory, boys have better spatial or geographic memories (1987, p.232). This suggests that, in order to facilitate boys' memorisation of vocabulary, a fundamental part of language learning, teachers need to make extensive use of illustrations and to draw tangible connections with words, a practice which may often be abandoned under the pressure of preparing Key Stage 4 students for examinations. Powell, citing psychological developments in research at the time of his writing, has suggested that boys might benefit more than girls from having visual cues immediately reinforced by presentation of the written word (Powell, 1979). In advocating more self-directed learning for boys, Graham and Rees (1995) acknowledge the theory that girls are encouraged to

memorise and boys to become independent thinkers. Research has yet to reveal the most suitable teaching styles to accommodate these differential learning styles, but even when we are in possession of the solutions, executing them in a mixed classroom will not be without problems.

1.3.6.4 Sex of the teacher

A commonly-quoted cause of the disparity between boys' and girls' achievements in foreign languages is the outnumbering of male by female staff. The preponderance of women teachers is blamed for perpetuating the myth of languages as a female subject, a view upheld by one male teacher who could recall only one male colleague in twenty-one years of teaching (Smith, 1995). Research into this area has, however, largely provided evidence to the contrary. The HMI team dismissed the notion that the sex of the teacher could influence boys' apathy towards languages (HMI, 1985), Powell and Batters (1986) found that pupils of both sexes rejected the idea that one sex of teacher is to be preferred to the other, and Clark and Trafford (1996) cite evidence that pupils regard the teacher's personality as more important than their sex.

This is clearly an enormously complex area of research that would benefit from further analyses of pupils' views and behaviours which are more in-depth than those conducted to date. Such depth would appear necessary in order to probe beyond 'correct' responses that may be generated by pupils' fear of being branded 'sexist'. It is, indeed, a lofty claim that pupils' responses to their teacher and the subject do not take any account of the teacher's sex, particularly if one argues that social conditioning of the kind described earlier in this chapter encourages, at least to some extent, differing responses to others according to their sex. It is not inconceivable that the

dearth of male modern languages teachers may reinforce its feminine connotations in the minds of young males desperate to prove their male identity. Such doubts are clearly shared by Clark and Trafford (1996) who, in spite of their findings mentioned above, recommend that, where staffing allows, all pupils are taught by a male teacher at some stage of their education.

Some of these questions surrounding the role played by the sex of the teacher are explored further in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.6.1 and Chapter 7, Section 7.4.2.3.3.

1.3.7 Careers guidance

Parental influence on pupils' attitudes to schooling is clearly not restricted only to the pre-school years. Parents' subject preferences need not be explicit; as Arnot has pointed out, the tendency of mothers to help with English homework and fathers with mathematics constitutes an important model in itself (Arnot, 1987). Riddell's research (1992) has revealed, however, that parents are consciously involved in constructing their offspring's future careers and lives in determining option choices. She found that middle-class parents are most involved, encouraging boys to pursue physical sciences and girls foreign languages. When confronted with their role, they often deny responsibility, attributing option choices to genetic make-up and peer-group pressure (p. 125). Any campaign to present the case for languages as a worthwhile subject for boys must, therefore, also address their parents.

1.4 Conclusions

It is evident, then, that the possible reasons for boys' underachievement are manifold, and that differential attitudes to foreign languages may be nurtured from infancy. In order to redress the imbalance of the sexes in modern foreign languages one

would have to heighten awareness of the problem in all sectors of society: parents; nursery and other teachers; teacher educators and their students; heads of school; careers advisors; employers; the media, and the pupils themselves.

Whilst a foreign language per se may not represent anathema to the male secondary school population, some factors in the teaching of the subject may render girls' attitudes to it more positive. As Harris et al have indicated, boys are far less likely than girls to work hard to overcome motivational difficulties in subjects which they do not enjoy (1993, p. 7).

It is possible that, as languages continue to gain prestige in business and industry, pupils' direct experience of the advantages of foreign language proficiency may render intervention strategies unnecessary, at least for the professional classes. Progress in the field would, however, appear to be slow. Historical documents record myths that are still prevalent today: that women in the seventeenth century had an innate gift for languages; and that, in the eighteenth century, they were "less disposed to ridicule the accent or other peculiarities of a foreigner" (Bayley & Ronish, 1992, p. 372).

In the interim, while society still insists that gender divides are maintained by boys and girls confirming their identity through polarised behaviours and learning styles, some teachers consider that the most practical solution is to acknowledge the differences and accommodate them in single-sex classes. This is the central theme to be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Single-sex teaching

2. Introduction

This chapter aims to contextualise single-sex initiatives in modern languages by examining the arguments surrounding single-sex schools and by describing similar initiatives in other disciplines. It attempts to locate contemporary views on single-sex education within a historical framework of policy-making and research which has undertaken typological comparisons of schools from three main perspectives: feminist thinking; learning outcomes; and pupil attitudes to specific subjects.

The development of pedagogical interest in single-sex setting in co-educational schools is outlined in relation to shifting interpretations of equal opportunities. Three kinds of single-sex initiatives are examined: whole-school initiatives; awareness-raising gender projects; and initiatives in maths, science and technology.

The final section considers research findings regarding boys' attainment in modern languages in all-boys schools which suggest a positive correlation with attitude. The hypothesis that boys in co-educational schools may benefit from being taught modern languages in single-sex groups is discussed in a summary of research evidence based on a small number of such initiatives.

2.1 Single-sex schools

2.1.1 Recent debates

In recent years educationists' interest in single-sex schools appears to have grown in inverse proportion to the availability of such schools. A steady decline in numbers has been evident since the 1960s; in 1996 there were only 424 single-sex

schools in the UK compared with 3,190 co-educational schools (Ofsted & EOC, 1996). There can be little doubt as to the reasons for the emergence of this interest: league tables ranking schools according to their GCSE results, first published by the Conservative government in the early 1990s, highlight the unrivalled success rate of all-girls schools while suggesting that all-boys schools produce results inferior to those of co-educational schools. This disparity in success rates is illustrated in Figure III which gives a breakdown of GCSE grades A-C by type of school. It is clear from this data that it is only in the independent, selective sector that all-boys schools achieve better results than mixed schools.

The apparent reliability of this quantitative data, which had never before been collated on such a large scale, prompted considerable research activity and discussion. A three-year study was set up at Manchester University under the auspices of the Headmasters' Conference Co-ed group to investigate the potential benefits of single-sex schooling. Its conclusions, outlined in a report published in 1995, were as follows:

“The good performance of girls' and boys' schools at GCSE and 'A'-level seems not to be a consequence of single-sex schooling per se. What at first sight looks like a school effect is in fact due mainly to differences in intake (particularly ability and social class), history and tradition.”

(Smithers & Robinson, 1995, p. 12)

This view that the setting policy plays only an incidental role in the success of single-sex schools which, more importantly, attract a high-calibre intake, was received angrily by representatives of all-girls and all-boys schools. The Girls' Schools Association strongly denied the claim that girls could benefit from co-education (Rafferty, 1995), and a report produced by a group of independent mixed schools insisted that 'no hard evidence' had been found of either the advantages or

FIGURE III

PROPORTION OF PUPILS ACHIEVING 5+ A-C GRADES IN 1994 BY SCHOOL TYPE

	Schools	Roll	% A-C
LEA Comprehensive			
All boys	56	7,057	29.9
All girls	79	11,256	41.1
Mixed	1,804	279,279	36.3
LEA Secondary Modern			
All boys	11	1,133	18.5
All girls	16	2,160	33.8
Mixed	84	9,551	21.5
Grant-maintained comprehensive			
All boys	43	5,842	39.7
All girls	30	3,714	50.4
Mixed	391	59,759	41.1
Grant-maintained Selective			
All boys	38	3,827	91.4
All girls	26	2,466	91.6
Mixed	23	2,209	94.0
Independent no fixed policy			
All boys	25	677	55.9
All girls	39	953	60.5
Mixed	193	3,805	57.4
Independent Selective			
All boys	119	10,542	89.6
All girls	236	12,765	91.2
Mixed	293	15,184	78.5
Voluntary-aided Comprehensive			
All boys	21	2,588	34.1
All girls	34	3,930	47.4
Mixed	255	33,893	43.4

SOURCE: Educational Reforms and Gender Equality in Schools (1996) Arnot,

David & Weiner, p. 41

disadvantages (Clare, 1995). The report's content would, indeed, seem to contain a number of shortcomings. While the summary refers to "... a detailed review of the evidence", the report itself seems to offer only a superficial overview of the issues. In spite of its purported intention to draw comparisons between the two kinds of school, it fails to acknowledge that, overall, boys in mixed schools achieve GCSE results which are superior to those of their peers in single-sex schools. Comparison of GCSE success rates is restricted to boys' and girls' schools, and interpretation of the disparity between the two is limited to the observation that

"... the performance of boys' schools at GCSE is, to some extent, overshadowed by the generally superior results of girls."

(ibid, Summary)

The publication of 'A' level results in the same year gave additional fodder to critics of the study, as pupils of single-sex schools outperformed their peers in mixed schools; only two schools in the independent schools' 'A' level league table were co-educational. And a study conducted by Gerard McCrum at Oxford University blamed the decline in girls' 'A' level grades on the phasing out of all-girls grammar schools (Scott-Clark, 1996).

In a recent publication entitled The Gender Divide (1996) Ofsted and the Equal Opportunities Commission uphold Smithers' theory regarding the significance of variables other than segregated setting in determining outcomes. Three variables are named: the school's "socio-economic context", the "ability profile" of the intake; and "parental support". The results of preliminary analysis of these factors, however, stand in direct contrast to Smithers' findings. Statistical analysis taking into account socio-economic data reveals single-sex schools achieving slightly better results than co-ed schools. This would suggest that the success of all-girls schools cannot simply be

attributed to the exclusivity of the intake. The report adds that most single-sex schools are perceived by inspectors to be improving through “purposeful and effective management” and “carefully thought-out objectives for improvement” (p.24). It also draws attention to a few cases in which boys’ schools are achieving better results than adjacent girls’ schools which have a similar intake. In the absence of broad-based empirical research, which analyses qualitative as well as quantitative data, the debate is set to continue.

2.1.2 A brief history of single-sex education in the UK

Research into the history of single-sex schooling frequently includes a reference to a statement published by the National Union of Teachers in 1976 which argues for the abolition of segregated schools on the grounds that they “educate boys and girls according to the needs of boys and girls as if those needs were distinguishable from each other.” (in Deem, 1987, p. 53) This view that single-sex schools are anachronistic is based on a conviction that society’s, and especially employers’, equal treatment of boys and girls demands that they have equal treatment in school and equal access to the curriculum. That all single-sex schools are, historically, discriminatory in terms of the curriculum they offered is, however, a false assumption. Lavigneur (1988, p. 201-211) describes the ideological dichotomy of the two most prominent heads of all-girls schools in the nineteenth century - Miss Beale and Miss Buss. Miss Beale’s school, Cheltenham Ladies’ College, was founded on the model of boys’ public schools and sought to furnish girls with skills regarded as appropriate for their sex and in keeping with notions of Victorian femininity. Miss Buss’s two schools, in contrast, embraced a more liberal philosophy, admitting students of any religious denomination and from any social class and aiming to equip them with the qualifications necessary to make an

independent living. Academic values were given precedence over domestic subjects, and while Miss Beale refused to enter her girls for public examinations, fearing that the subjects were “unsuited for girls” (ibid, p.202), and that they would lead to undesirable rivalry, Miss Buss openly encouraged her pupils to compete with boys in the Cambridge Local examination. With the exception of some public and private schools, it was Miss Buss’s egalitarian principles that shaped the gradual creation of increasing numbers of girls’ schools. As Lavigneur points out (op. cit.), proponents of co-education have frequently ignored the central philosophy of many of these schools, a philosophy which reflects the objectives of later advocates of co-education: that girls enjoy the same treatment and access to the curriculum as boys.

The decision to introduce mixed schools at the turn of the century was not, however, based on sound educational or egalitarian principles, but, rather, economic necessity. The provision of education for all quickly revealed inadequate resources, necessitating the creation of mixed establishments. Wherever possible, however, boys and girls were educated apart within the same building, evidence of which is still visible in many schools with separate boys’ and girls’ entrances.

Supporters of the reform shared a common conviction in the social advantages of co-education. Their approval of the mixed school as more ‘natural’, in its emulation of the structure of the family and society, still underlies much public opinion on the subject today. Male educationists and teachers in public boys’ schools placed particular emphasis on the benefits for boys, amongst them the Reverend Grant who issued the following ecclesiastical admonition in 1903:

“...the monastic system in schools is the stronghold of immorality.”

(Grant, 1903, p. 27)

The presence of girls, he claimed, helped to counter the depravity which manifested itself both in boys' idleness and their use of coarse language. This view was reiterated in milder, secular terms two decades later by Dale (1974), whose seminal research into single-sex schools spanned twenty-six years. His conclusion that "the average co-educational grammar school is a happier community for both staff and pupils than the average single-sex school" (p. 273) conceals the male bias which emerges only a few pages earlier:

"....the progress of boys is probably improved by co-education while that of girls is not harmed...."

(p. 267)

Boys are, he opines, the greater beneficiaries of co-education since they are exposed to the differential, and more refined, interests and behaviours of their female counterparts.

Female opinion at the turn of the century was seemingly more divided. While some early feminists claimed that co-education would help to reduce male dominance in the classroom and provide girls with new opportunities, many headmistresses and female teachers predicted that the inevitable suppression of girls by their male peers would be detrimental to their academic welfare. At the Association of Headmistresses' Conference in 1905, Miss Benger of Swansea County School argued, for instance, that the curriculum of co-ed schools was "unlikely to be the best for girls" and that girls would be forced to withdraw in a male-dominated sphere (in Brehony, 1987, p. 11). Their reservations were also compounded by a personal fear of having to relinquish their posts of authority to the sex deemed superior in mixed society, and apprehension about the effect that male staff would have on their female pupils (Woods, 1903, p. 126-142).

The creation of comprehensive schools in the 1960s served to reinforce arguments in favour of co-education. Sex segregation was perceived as running contrary to the underlying principles of this new system, resulting in a further decline in the number of single-sex schools. A number of researchers have argued, however, that the comprehensive reform was ill-conceived and took little account of pupils' or teachers' needs. (Daunt, 1977; Hawkins, 1987; Reynolds & Sullivan, 1987). It can, of course, be no accident that recent public and parental interest in single-sex schooling has developed against the background of the creation of a wider range of schools. The new climate of 'parental choice' has engendered greater independence for schools who may now opt out of the local education authority's jurisdiction. In 1995, 30% of grant-maintained schools were single-sex (Shaw, 1995, p. 46), reflecting a movement away from unitary educational policy. Newspaper reports and personal correspondence have shown that a considerable number of state mixed schools are currently piloting single-sex initiatives. This suggests that political pressure to raise standards has produced a more positive response to the concept of segregated teaching.

2.1.3 A review of research

2.1.3.1 Feminist debates

The majority of studies of single-sex schooling over the past two decades fall broadly within feminist schools of thought. They are characterised by vigorous discourses, and even occasionally histrionic invectives (Cowell, 1981), which set out to debunk Dale's earlier claims that "the average co-educational grammar school is a happier community for both staff and pupils than the average single-sex school...." and that "....this happiness is not at the expense of academic progress." (Dale, 1974, p. 273). Numerous researchers have criticised these conclusions as partisan and outdated.

They attest that Dale was an exponent of the predominant philosophy of the 1960s which perceived the overriding advantage of co-education as its affinity to society's 'natural' structure. In subscribing to this view he, and many other, principally male, educationists, were, according to feminists, overlooking, or possibly endorsing, society's discrimination against females, which is inevitably perpetuated in any institution modelling itself on that society. Mahony (1985) voices the reservations shared by many feminist researchers in the field at that time:

“.....co-education as things stand is not more socially desirable for girls because it is more normal. Rather, because it is more normal it is, for girls, highly undesirable.”

(Mahony, 1985,p.93)

Feminist researchers, therefore, tend to champion single-sex schools since they offer girls an escape route from the injustices they suffer in the mixed classroom. Boys' verbal and physical hegemony in the co-educational classroom has been well-documented (Askew & Ross, 1988; Stanworth, 1988; Jones & Mahony, 1989; Delamont, 1990). Boys receive the bulk of teachers' attention, dominate class discussions and physically appropriate more space than girls. Their expectations of themselves are notably higher in mixed classes (Spender & Sarah, 1988) and they commonly use girls as a negative reference group, (Riddell, 1992) subjecting them to physical harassment and using a language of abuse that principally comprises pejorative terms associated with the female, in order to confirm their identities as men (Mahony, 1985).

The consensus amongst feminist researchers is that co-educational schools preclude the possibility of equal treatment for boys and girls, notwithstanding teachers' claims to be treating them the same. Kelly (1981) underlines the distinction:

“One of the most pervasive educational fallacies is that equality means identity. Identity of outcomes, perhaps, but certainly not identity of treatment. The teacher who says, ‘I don’t discriminate against my girls; I treat them just like the boys’ is ignoring the fact that we live in a sexually divided society.”

(p. 277)

While mixed schools replicate society’s male hierarchy, thereby benefiting boys both academically and socially, it is claimed that it is only in single-sex schools that differentiated teaching can ensure genuine equality for girls.

2.1.3.2 Academic attainment

Early surveys of academic achievement reflect contemporary league table data which suggest that boys perform better in mixed schools while girls achieve better results in single-sex schools. Dale (1974) describes a survey conducted by Tyson over two years in 1925-6 which examined statistics from an exam principally taken in grammar schools. The study used three large samples from boys’, girls’ and mixed schools, the smallest numbering 1,500 boys in co-education. In almost all of the nine subjects analysed, boys in co-educational schools outperformed their peers in single-sex schools. The clear exception was French, in which the boys in single-sex schools performed better in both years.

Dales’ own work on pupil attainment (ibid.), which constituted the third stage of his longitudinal study, took a sample of around thirty pupils from each of four boys’,

girls' and mixed schools in 1949, and six girls', eight boys' and nine mixed schools in 1950. These were representative cross samples of all pupils sitting 'O' levels at fifteen/sixteen years of age, and Dale also took into account the social class of the father and the pupils' ages. In the first year of testing, the co-educational boys achieved better results than their segregated peers in six subjects and worse in four, and a statistically significant difference was noted in favour of the segregated boys in French. In the second year of testing, when the sample was considerably larger, the co-educational boys did better in nine subjects and the segregated boys in only one. Dale notes, however, that the segregated boys achieved better results in one of their three French examinations, the speaking test.

More recent research substantiates Ofsted's tentative conclusions on the importance of other variables in comparisons of mixed and single-sex schools (1996). Steedman's four-month study (1983), funded by the EOC, concludes that the differences in examination results from mixed and single-sex schools are markedly reduced if one allows for differences in pupils' initial ability and home background. Using data from the National Child Development Study which monitored more than 14,000 people all born in one week in March 1958, she investigated the cognitive ability and background of pupils attending both types of school in England and Wales. Data was collected when the pupils were aged eleven, as they entered secondary school, and again, in 1974, when they were sixteen. At the age of eleven, both boys and girls going on to single-sex secondary schools scored higher than their peers whose fathers tended to have 'manual' jobs. The single-sex schools in the sample were, however, frequently grammar or independent schools and selected their intake. Steedman's analysis of pupils' achievements in individual subject combinations reveals

only marginal, inconclusive sex differences in most subjects, but a marked difference in French. She comments:

“The implication is that the only subject which is enhanced both for boys and for girls by single-sex teaching is French.”

(1983, p. 34)

In her conclusion she concedes that the enormity of the differences between pupils is such that there are insufficient grounds to determine whether single-sex or mixed schools are more effective.

Bone's study of all-girls schools, also published in 1983, similarly claims that single-sex setting is not the most important factor in determining success rate (Bone, 1983). She ascribes greater influence to the type of school (comprehensive, grammar, independent or secondary modern) and the style of school (traditional or modern). Like Steedman, she underlines the relationship between the high academic profile of these schools and the above-average ability of their intake. Two studies were undertaken which claim to take account of the samples' 'differing characteristics', although these are not described in any detail. They discovered that single-sex schools were only marginally more successful than mixed schools and this difference was not statistically significant. Her conclusion is unequivocal: a single-sex environment alone does not have a significant effect on girls' academic performance.

A more recent American survey (Riordan, 1990) of 29,737 students who graduated in 1982 examines the short- and long-term outcomes of mixed and single-sex education. Its conclusions resemble most closely those suggested by raw analysis of exam statistics in this country. After controlling for home background and initial attainment levels, the short-term outcome was that boys from mixed schools gained higher marks in cognitive tests than those from single-sex schools, in spite of the latter

enjoying substantial advantages such as higher parental income, fewer siblings and superior initial ability. Further adjustment for differential factors narrowed this gap somewhat, revealing only a slight difference in favour of boys attending mixed schools. The results favoured, however, those girls attending single-sex schools, in spite of their lower socio-economic backgrounds.

2.1.3.3 Pupil attitudes to subjects

While the debate surrounding the merits or demerits of single-sex education as a whole continues, research opinion is united on one of its observed effects. There is now considerable evidence to suggest that male and female pupils in single-sex schools have a more positive attitude to subjects traditionally favoured by the opposite sex. Pupils in co-educational schools, in contrast, tend to conform to sex-stereotypical perceptions of subjects.

Research in this area alludes frequently to Ormerod's study of pupils' subject preferences (1975). He examined the subject choices of 1,204 pupils in nineteen secondary schools - ten single-sex and five co-educational grammar schools, and four mixed comprehensive schools. Pupils were asked to compare pairs of subjects and state their preference. The results were then subjected to statistical analysis and a 'gender spectrum' was produced showing the perceived 'masculinity' and 'femininity' of individual subjects. 'Female' subjects included R.E., English, art, modern languages, history, music, housecraft and Latin, and 'male' subjects chemistry, geography, maths, physics, craft and technical subjects. Ormerod underlines the direct correlation between these preferences and the distribution of male and female pupils entered for GCE 'O' level examinations. In single-sex schools pupils' preferences diverged from these stereotypical norms and Ormerod observes:

“ Sex-linked polarisation of subject preferences were more marked in co-educational than in single-sex schools.”

(1975, p. 257)

Other studies seem to corroborate his findings. Bone (1983) describes Dale's Schools Project in 1964 and 1966 which found that fifteen year-old girls attending mixed schools were less interested in maths than those from single-sex schools, while their male counterparts were less interested in French than boys attending single-sex schools. Her own study revealed that girls taught in single-sex environments are more positive towards traditionally male subject areas, and that boys' and girls' academic interests tend to overlap more in the single-sex sector. Harvey's study of the preferences of 2,311 third year secondary pupils (1984) is rarely cited, in spite of its considerable scope (the sample is almost twice the size of Ormerod's) and ostensible rigour. Pupils in thirteen 11-18 comprehensive schools - seven mixed, three boys' and three girls' - in the Southwest of England were asked to rank subjects not only in order of enjoyment but also perception of their importance. The calculation of mean positions for each subject revealed that while modern languages were markedly more popular and seen as more important by girls across the whole sample, single-sex educated boys rated them more highly in terms of enjoyment and importance than their mixed school counterparts.

Feminist researchers have been especially keen to highlight the potential of single-sex setting for girls as a means of redressing their under-performance and under-representation in male-dominated subjects. A research project carried out in 1993 under the auspices of GASAT (Gender and Science and Technology), for instance, concluded that girls in single-sex schools have more positive attitudes towards computer use (Department of Trade and Industry, 1997).

Causal hypotheses about differences in attitude build on Ormerod's assumption that in co-education boys and girls choose subjects which "reaffirm their perceived sex role". Feminists such as Spender and Sarah (1988) claim that girls attending single-sex schools have fewer inhibitions and that their attitudes to subjects are not influenced by their desire to appear feminine in front of a male audience. This argument would appear to be strengthened by Bone's discovery that, with the exception of grammar schools, none of the schools in her study openly encouraged pupils to take up 'male' subjects.

Ormerod's conclusions furthermore consider the possibility that differences in teaching style in single-sex schools may account for attitude differences in pupils. Teachers' sub-conscious, or deliberate, selection of topics that will engage the sex-specific interests of their pupils, or their handling of material to accommodate common learning styles, may encourage positive attitudes and raise achievement.

Recent research, on the whole, has failed to investigate this last issue in any satisfactory detail, and the current study aims to address it. Important evidence in the higher education sector of the impact of single-sex education on students' subject choices has also been largely disregarded. An educational survey of three German cities - Dortmund, Paderborn and Aachen - in 1985 revealed that while only 4% of the grammar schools in those areas were all-girls, they produced up to 60% of female computing and chemistry students in higher education (Stern, 1992). A study of the physics departments in two universities and the physical science department in one polytechnic (Thomas, 1990) similarly found that sixteen out of 24 female science students in the sample interviewed had attended single-sex schools.

2.2 Single-sex initiatives in co-educational schools

2.2.1 Pedagogical motives for establishing single-sex groups

Single-sex groupings within co-educational schools were initially proposed in the 1980s by feminist researchers anxious to improve girls' academic achievement. The strategy was presented as a preferable alternative to single-sex schools in which, it was claimed, girls are disadvantaged socially and are generally unhappier than in mixed schools (Stanworth, 1983; Mahony, 1985; Spender & Sarah, 1988). It was perceived as an ideal compromise:

“ ... it may be that the segregation of boys and girls for specific purposes within mixed schools could offer a means of combining the best qualities of both single-sex and co-educational schools.”

(Bone, 1983, p. 2)

The idea that boys may also benefit from single-sex groupings is still relatively new, but shares the same root as the upsurge of interest in the 1980s: concern about underachievement. Just as the interest in all-girls groups in the 1980s was a response to concern about their under-performance in maths, science and technology, current interest in single-sex groups is steadily increasing in tandem with the growing realisation that boys are falling behind their female peers. Schools' and researchers' discussions about the possible benefits for boys, and often their ensuing actions, have already invalidated Deem's view that single-sex education is only advocated by those with an interest in creating equality of opportunity for girls (Deem, 1987, p. vi-vii). The reflections of Sarah et al (1988) on the exclusive benefits for girls have been made redundant by recent developments:

“To our knowledge there has been no recent discussion arguing for a return to single-sex education *in the interest of boys.*”

(p. 57-8, my italics)

Initiatives in ‘female’ subjects (Ormerod, 1975, p. 262) represent a recent recognition of the potential benefits of single-sex setting for boys. They constitute a reaction to the much-publicised disparity in boys’ and girls’ achievement and aim to enhance boys’ attitudes and attainment, while simultaneously acknowledging previous research that has demonstrated the advantages for girls. While such initiatives are currently regarded as a radical measure, sometimes taken as a last resort to reduce an embarrassing gap highlighted in an Ofsted inspection, interest in them appears to be mounting. This is, no doubt, at least partially owing to the success rates of all-girls’ schools and the unresolved debate surrounding the possible benefits of boys’ schools. It is also probably a consequence of the growing realisation that groups set by ability lend themselves easily to single-sex setting. A ‘top set’ foreign languages class, which all too commonly is dominated by girls, clearly facilitates the creation of an all-girls group.

Researchers have not, it seems, approached this pedagogical innovation with alacrity. There is, it seems, a surprising shortage of empirical data relating to the formation of single-sex groups in mixed schools, although this may be partially attributed to a lack of faith in data derived from projects which are, as yet, in their infancy. This apparent apathy has been counterbalanced by the interest shown by the popular press. Numerous headlines have enthused over the miraculous properties of the new setting arrangement while relegating other concomitant, and possibly more important, variables, such as smaller class sizes, intensive tuition and differentiated resources, to small print (see, for instance, Syal & Trump, 1996, “Single-sex classes

raise boys' grades"; Halpin, 1997, "Triumph of the school that split up boys and girls"). Unsurprisingly, there is no media interest in single-sex initiatives which have proved to be less effective.

2.2.2 Whole school initiatives

Amongst those schools currently implementing single-sex initiatives, most are piloting segregation in only one subject where the gender imbalance in attainment is most evident, while a small number are implementing segregation across the curriculum. Single-sex groups are generally created in the lower school and pupils are later re-integrated when it is felt that the pressure of GCSE courses and greater maturity render mixed-sex groups more expedient. Contrary to the picture sometimes presented by the media, the rationale behind such measures does not always focus merely on pupils' educational welfare. The initial impetus is sometimes derived from the schools' proximity to single-sex schools with whom they have been forced to compete. For some, single-sex teaching does not represent a departure from tradition; one such comprehensive school in Essex has taught pupils in single-sex classes for the past twenty years (Dore, 1995). Single-sex initiatives may also result from parental pressure; in the case of one such school, parents approached the governors to present their case for single-sex setting within the school, since all other single-sex schools in the area were considered to be too far away for their children (Crequer, 1997).

2.2.3 Single-sex initiatives promoting pupils' gender awareness

Although the focus of this study is single-sex initiatives which aim to promote academic achievement, some consideration will first be given to initiatives which aim to raise awareness of gender roles. Despite the divergence in aims, both kinds of

initiative share some common ground. Both inevitably sensitise pupils and teachers to the issue of gender, implicitly in the case of achievement-raising initiatives and explicitly in the case of awareness-raising initiatives.

In the absence of the opposite sex, pupils find themselves having to re-define their individual roles in the collective and this, unavoidably, impacts on the learning process. While gender awareness projects are usually executed on the understanding that the effects will be twofold - cognitive and affective - projects promoting academic achievement tend to focus on the former, neglecting the latter. The possible consequences of this are discussed later in Chapter 8, but it is clear that there is a dearth of research activity and published work in this area.

Recent documentation of gender awareness-raising single-sex projects is limited, suggesting only small-scale and short-term experimentation in schools and in the form of informal community projects (see Tett, 1997). The formation of single-sex groups for the purpose of exploring gender relations and identities has largely arisen from concerns about girls' welfare. Throughout the last decade and the early part of this, several action research projects were inspired by proposals such as the following, founded on feminist anxieties about girls' experiences of co-educational secondary schools:

“We could consider making a space for girls-only groups within mixed schools, where girls could share experiences and work out for themselves constructive ways of dealing with gender inequality and sexual harassment.”

(Stanworth, 1988, p. 59)

Such initiatives sometimes constituted schools' realisation of 'equal opportunities' policies, newly conceived in the 1980s as a tardy response to the Sex

Discrimination Act of 1975. They sought to empower female pupils whom researchers increasingly recognised as the victims of an oppressive male hierarchy prevalent in co-educational schools (Whyld, 1983; Jones & Mahony, 1989; Spender, 1989). Female teachers encouraged girls in single-sex groups to discuss discrimination openly and endeavoured to equip them to counter it on their return to the mixed classroom through assertiveness training and by fostering mutual support. Such projects were not restricted to the UK; Kruse (1992) describes, amongst others, a project in a Danish co-educational school which involved segregating two classes for varying lengths of time in a number of subjects. Pupils were initially segregated at the age of ten or eleven for a period of two months and again at intervals over the next three years whenever gendered patterns of behaviour were seen to be re-emerging.

The simultaneous creation of all-boys groups was generally regarded as an unavoidable, and often lamentable, by-product of realising equal opportunities policies which had a strong feminist slant. Kruse sums up the general response:

“Setting up girls’ classes within co-educational schools has meant that boys’ classes invariably emerge.”

(op. cit., p. 82)

The apparent lack of interest in all-boys groups contrasted sharply with pedagogical enthusiasm for all-girls groups. This negativity was, no doubt, at least partially an adverse reaction to the realisation that boys were responsible for girls’ academic and social subjugation, but was compounded by the lack of good teaching materials available for use with boys.

Notwithstanding teachers’ initial misgivings and the shortage of suitable resources, a number of all-boys groups formed in recent years seem, however, to have experienced some success. Describing a project initiated in 1990 as part of the Gender

Action Project (GAP), Walden (1994) outlines the academic benefits enjoyed by boys: greater attention to presentation; improved concentration and more time spent on task. Kruse (1992) reports how teachers, contrary to their expectations, enjoyed the more relaxed atmosphere in boys' groups and felt relieved of the anxiety they experienced in mixed groups at the threat of boys monopolising lessons.

Both researchers stress the need for different teaching strategies necessitated by boys' differing styles of interaction. Encouraging co-operation instead of competition, for example, was a prime objective for teachers of boys' groups in the two projects. In the GAP project lessons were structured to facilitate the teacher's control; each boy worked at his own desk and was only permitted to work with a partner once a week. Report sheets, signed by the teacher at the end of the lesson and by the Head of Year at the end of each week, were used not only for recording misbehaviour and sanctions but also for noting good behaviour.

The male teacher of the Danish boys offers the following advice on working with male pupils:

“... understand them, accept them, go along with them, control situations together with them, and recognise your own male identity in your being together with them.”

(Kruse, 1992, p. 95)

This teacher felt that he used his own sex to advantage, first to encourage a close relationship with his pupils and then to undertake 'skills training' (Tett, 1997) in exploring the internal relationships and feelings of the group. The importance of male staff representing the alternative role model to the 'macho, sexist hooligan' is likewise underlined by Jackson and Salisbury (1996) in their rationale for schools' gender initiatives with boys. As peripatetic facilitators of gender-awareness courses for boys,

they represent a new interest in single-sex groups as a vehicle for exploring boys' perceptions of sex roles and masculinities. Re-interpreting 'equal opportunities' in the general climate of concern at the possible emergence of a male sub-culture, they argue that schools should model pro-active, rather than reactive, strategies to tackle boys' insubordination on feminist work on gender and education. They challenge the "overdeterministic sex role theory" (p.107), which sees boys as the passive victims of socialisation, and advocate all-boys groups as a means of empowering boys to express the complex feelings of insecurity that characterise their struggles to become 'masculine'. While many schools already teaching all-boys groups would, no doubt, endorse their arguments, the scepticism inherent in the article's title, "Why Should Secondary Schools Take Working with Boys Seriously?" seems an accurate reflection of schools' reluctance to institute boys' groups for any reason other than boosting academic performance.

2.2.4 Subject-specific initiatives

2.2.4.1 Initiatives in maths, science and technology

It has already been intimated that the impetus for the formation of most single-sex groups within mixed schools in the recent past has been concern about girls' social and academic welfare. It is, then, unsurprising that most initiatives have targeted those areas of the curriculum in which girls were perceived to be underachieving, namely maths, science and technology.

Single-sex setting constituted one of a range of intervention strategies implemented under the auspices of action research projects throughout the 1980s. These were set up to address girls' numerical under-representation in boy-dominated subjects; in 1980, 77% of the total 'O' level entry in physics was male and 23% female,

while 96% of the entry for technical drawing was male and 4% female. (Deem, 1987, p. 39). Perhaps the most well-known action research project is GIST (Girls Into Science and Technology), a four-year study which involved ten co-educational schools in Greater Manchester. Two thousand pupils who entered school in 1980 were tracked from the beginning of Year 7 to the end of Year 9. The project's objective was to:

“....initiate and support school-based efforts to improve girls' attitudes to physical science and craft subjects, and to encourage more girls to study these subjects when they become optional.”

(Smail, Whyte & Kelly, 1981-2, p. 620)

To this end, the researchers held meetings with staff to convince them of the value of changing sex-stereotyped attitudes and choices; evaluated sex differences in pupils' subject knowledge and interests; investigated pupils' image of science and scientists; examined parents' attitudes; and co-ordinated visits to schools by female scientists and technologists. A small number of single-sex clubs and classes were established on a short-term basis as a means of boosting girls' confidence and enabling teachers to modify their strategies to accommodate girls' preferred learning styles. One school ran single-sex science clubs, work clinics and a technology club at lunchtimes, and arranged for a girls' group to visit the College of Building. Two other schools taught science to single-sex groups for one year but, in spite of a significant improvement in the performance of girls, teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the scheme, citing the poor behaviour of all-boys groups. The effects of single-sex setting within this project can, admittedly, only be viewed within the context of multiple strategies, often as an incidental background against which other measures were implemented (see Whyte, 1986).

More recent, small-scale projects have adopted the formation of all-girls groups as their starting point. Danischewsky and Joseph (1994) describe a school initiative which, in 1989, set up some single-sex groups in Year 7 to encourage more girls to opt for traditional masculine subjects like technology. In spite of initial staff scepticism regarding the perceived incongruity of such a project within a mixed comprehensive school, and reservations about the behaviour of all-boys groups, the scheme proved successful enough to justify repeating the setting arrangement with the 1990 intake. The effectiveness of the initiative was monitored by the school's Equal Opportunity Working Party who administered questionnaires to the teachers of girls' groups, undertook classroom observation of Year 8 girls in mixed and single-sex classes and provided them with the opportunity to discuss their experiences from the non-threatening perspective of a hypothetical new girl. Proof of the initiative's success was visible in staff's reports that the girls in single-sex groups enjoyed greater access to equipment and that they were keen to continue working after the end of the lesson, while those in mixed groups packed up straight away. The research team concluded that there was some evidence to show that girls' confidence had benefited from single-sex teaching, although this was not necessarily a long-term effect. The sex and attitude of the teacher were regarded as equally important determinants of pupil attitude and behaviour, however, and it was noted that male teachers of girls' groups encountered more discipline problems than females.

A recent single-sex initiative in a co-educational high school in Northwest England took account of the possible differences in male and female teaching styles (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1996). Half of the Year 9 cohort was taught science in single-sex groups and the other half in mixed groups and by rotating science teachers pupils were exposed to a range of styles. Pupils' evaluations of this project revealed that while

those taught in single-sex classes remained positive about the project, those in mixed groups had negative views. The teachers of girls' groups reported enjoying the experience, marked by far less time spent reprimanding pupils. Teachers of all-boys groups noted an improvement in boys' conduct, even in the early stages. One of the boys' groups was seen to be:

“...less confrontational and less noisy than a mixed one would be. There is not a huge rush to get apparatus and there is less flexing of muscle for the girls and competition towards them....”

(op. cit., p.146)

The GASAT (Gender and Science and Technology) project, initiated in 1989 to encourage female activity in fields traditionally dominated by males, identifies single-sex setting as one of its six major areas of concern. Its report (Department of Trade and Industry, 1997) on 100 research projects outlines several international initiatives. A six-year project in Australia in the 1980s found that both boys and girls benefited from single-sex science classes. Girls participated more readily in physics classes and both sexes were less inclined to refer to sex stereotypes. A similar project over two years in Australia reported an improvement in girls' attitudes in spite of the teachers' 'less than positive' attitudes. Less successful outcomes are also described. A 1992 project in a UK primary school, for instance, found that girls working on a co-operative science task in single-sex groups did not achieve better results than those working in mixed groups. The authors of this report conclude:

“...the management of the group and the nature of the task are at least as important as the structure.”

(op. cit., p. 15)

This conclusion is supported by the findings of an Australian study in 1991

which reported that while girls benefit most from highly-structured groups which are closely monitored by the teacher, boys collaborate better when given the independence to organise the group themselves. The report's conclusion is cautious in its evaluation of single-sex groupings, opining:

“...mere segregation is not an automatic guarantee of success.”

(ibid)

Empirical evidence of the limitations of single-sex setting as an intervention strategy is given in Smith's account of a longitudinal study of maths classes (1986;1987). His data is drawn from two subsequent research projects at Stamford High School in Tameside, where staff had a keen interest in raising girls' achievement in mathematics. In the first stage of the project pupils from the 1979 intake were taught in mixed classes and served as a control group against which the pupils taught in single-sex classes, from the 1980 intake, were measured. The groups were observed throughout their five years of secondary schooling, and a non-verbal reasoning test administered in the first term of the pupils' first year enabled Smith to match individual pupils by ability and compare their academic progress. A battery of numeracy tests attempted in the second term of the third year, and towards the end of the fourth year, revealed only insignificant differences in the performance of the mixed and segregated girls, while both groups of boys achieved better results. While the results of the first test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in favour of the segregated girls in six out of thirteen topics, those obtained from the second test revealed differences well below a level of significance.

Smith infers from this that segregation may benefit girls' academic achievement in the first three years of secondary school. A further analysis by ability in the fourth year found that while mixed and segregated girls of lower ability performed almost as

well as their male counterparts, more able girls performed worse when compared with boys. External exam results closely resembled those of the fourth year tests; boys in both groups outperformed the girls and there was no significant difference between the results of girls in mixed and single-sex groups.

The single-sex groups also ostensibly failed to improve girls' attitudes to maths. An attitude questionnaire completed by the pupils at the end of their fourth year indicated that the segregated girls found maths more difficult, less useful and less enjoyable than their peers in the other three groupings. Again, the degree of negativity seemed to increase in proportion to the girls' ability; the most able girls had the most negative attitudes. Interviews with a small sample of these girls, however, revealed considerably more favourable opinions of the initiative. Six out of ten of them declared the initiative to have been a good idea, qualifying this by describing how they had felt much less self-conscious and more able to ask for help. Two factors which may have enhanced their views are, however, omitted from the report: the girls' limited frame of reference (they had no experience of mixed maths sets in secondary school) and the timing of the interviews (nearing the end of their fifth year, when most were probably looking forward to the termination of any formal contact with maths). Interviews with girls from mixed groups of average or above average ability around the same time nevertheless seemed to support the establishment of single-sex groups as a means of escaping the boys' poor behaviour.

Teachers' views that single-sex setting had proved most beneficial to pupils in the earlier years of secondary school were tested in the second stage of the project (Smith, 1987). Boys and girls from the 1981 intake were taught in single-sex groups in the first, second and third years and in mixed groups in the fourth and fifth years. Comparisons, where possible, were drawn with the groups studied in the previous

stage. The success of this initiative was far less equivocal. In contrast to the pattern observed in mixed sets, test and exam results revealed that girls taught in single-sex classes were performing at least as well as the boys by the end of their second year. External exam results at the end of the fifth year demonstrated the long-term advantages; there was little difference between boys' and girls' achievements.

Attitude questionnaires completed by pupils in the first term of their fifth year offered fewer grounds for optimism; girls' perceptions of maths were notably more negative than the boys' and resembled those of both mixed and segregated girls observed in the previous study. In this instance, Smith recognises that timing may have had a serious effect on attitudes as the pupils were under pressure, waiting for the results of their mock exams.

Smith's research represents a rigorous study of the effects of teaching maths to pupils in single-sex groups and his belief that it is the most detailed, longitudinal analysis in the field in the UK would still seem to hold true. The general soundness of his methodology would seem to validate his conclusions although greater attention to the following points may elucidate them further. Smith acknowledges both the part played by the staff's firm commitment to equal opportunities (1987, p. 35) and underlines the importance of differentiating schemes of work to accommodate sex-specific weaknesses (1986, p. 42). He does not, however, describe how or to what extent teachers acted on his recommendations, and fails to mention the possibility that staff's increased familiarity with teaching single-sex groups, and awareness of their needs, may have informed the success of the second stage. The positive results of the second initiative should also be viewed in the context of observations made only in the conclusion of the first report. Here, Smith refers to a national trend of improvement lately observed in girls' achievements in mathematics, and to a gradual change in

general attitude to maths as a 'predominantly masculine subject'. Five years on, the gathering momentum of these trends will indubitably have impacted on the outcomes of a project seeking to raise girls' achievement.

2.3 Single-sex teaching of modern foreign languages

2.3.1 Modern foreign languages in single-sex schools

The anomalous position occupied by modern foreign languages in the single-sex school debate has already been highlighted. Both Dale's and Steedman's generic studies identified French as the only subject in which girls' and boys' performance may be enhanced in single-sex schools. Analysis of pupils' GCSE results in modern languages in 1995/6 similarly reveals that in modern languages there is a divergence from the pattern of pupils' overall achievement in boys', girls' and co-educational schools. While all-boys schools attain lower levels of achievement overall than all-girls and mixed schools, their GCSE grades in modern languages are considerably higher than those achieved by pupils attending mixed schools (Figure IV). The disparity is particularly evident at the top end of the grade range; the percentage difference in A*-C grades in any modern language is 21.1%.

Dale (1974) also subscribes to the view that attitude has a direct influence on attainment. His discovery that boys attending all-boys schools showed considerably more interest in French than their co-educated peers, both at the ages of thirteen and fifteen, does claim to take account of social class and intelligence. The difference in attitude was not ascribed to either, but instead to "accentuated polarization" (p. 160) which also caused girls in co-educational schools to have a more positive attitude to French. Although none of the co-educated boys' free comments referred directly to this polarization, giving most frequently as their reasons for disliking French a 'poor

FIGURE IV

GCSE attempts and achievements of 15 year-old pupils in modern foreign languages by type of school, 1995/6

	Attempted GCSE				Achieved Grade A*-C			Achieved Grade A*-G		
	Boys		Girls		Mixed		Boys		Girls	
	Schools	Schools	Schools	Schools	Schools	Schools	Schools	Schools	Schools	Schools
Any Modern Language	77.4	88.1	72.0	52.1	63.3	30.9	75.6	86.9	69.4	
French	62.4	67.2	51.2	43.3	49.7	22.4	61.2	66.5	49.5	
German	21.2	22.5	21.1	16.2	18.1	10.4	20.9	22.3	20.5	
Spanish	7.6	12.3	5.0	5.5	8.9	2.1	7.4	12.1	4.7	
Other Modern Languages	4.4	7.4	2.4	3.2	5.7	1.6	4.2	7.2	2.3	

SOURCE: DFEE, August, 1997

teacher' or 'poor ability', Dale describes it as a "background force" (p. 161), subconsciously informing their thinking.

His view that boys feel inferior to girls in mixed groups is shared both by Steedman (1983) and by Beswick (1976), whose small-scale survey revealed that significantly fewer co-educated boys continue French at 'A' level than those taught in single-sex schools. From the seven boys' schools involved in his study, 10.4% of the total 'A' level entry were taking French, compared with 5.6% from the eight mixed schools. The total number of boys on lower sixth French 'A' level courses was 11.8% of the cohort in single-sex schools and 4.7% in mixed schools. He concludes that boys' awareness of girls' superior ability is heightened in the mixed classroom, causing boys to lose interest in and eventually opt out of the subject. Like Dale and Steedman, he highlights speaking French in the mixed classroom as an acute source of embarrassment for boys whose inhibitions are augmented by the experience of voice-breaking.

2.3.2 Single-sex initiatives in modern foreign languages

The possible benefits of single-sex setting for boys learning modern languages have been demonstrated by a small number of initiatives in co-educational schools. Deem (1987) describes how reticent boys became more confident in a successful single-sex initiative in Virginia in the late 1960s, and quotes the Principal's observation that boys "...do better work in foreign languages" (p.50). Beswick reports on an experiment conducted at Banbury School in which pupils in their second year were taught by the same teachers as in their first year, but in segregated groups. He writes of the results:

“...both boys and girls benefited academically from being segregated in French.”

(1976, p. 37-8)

Other than a qualifying statement to the effect that the boys’ performance had improved on that of the previous year and that the girls did ‘considerably better’ in single-sex groups than in mixed groups, no indication is given of how these results were obtained or the differences measured. The reliability of this data in the absence of this information should be carefully considered by researchers who frequently allude to this article.

Powell (1979) similarly relates the success of a single-sex initiative in the 1970s in which pupils were segregated in their second and third years. He describes an ‘immediate improvement’ in end-of-year test results compared with performance at the end of the first year. This improvement was most marked amongst the boys, and improvements in the “motivation, attitude, work, behaviour and competence” (p. 24) of all pupils when taught in segregated classes was noted by one of the teachers. His handling of the data is, however, more cautious, conceding that such evidence may be ‘unscientific’. He also demonstrates an awareness that success will not be secured merely through segregating, but, according to the teacher, through “a proper match of teacher personality and group” (ibid), and through differentiating schemes of work:

“Boys in single-sex groups could benefit from some form of compensatory programme of work while girls could be given a more intensive course at a time when their more advanced development in the language faculties is most apparent. If girls were ready for examinations earlier by this means, time would be available for more assistance to be given in those mathematical and science areas of study where girls are at

a disadvantage.”

(Powell, 1979, p.23)

Powell's theory that single-sex setting can foster boys' motivation in language learning is ostensibly corroborated by Batters' findings. Her doctoral study (Batters, 1988) of pupils' perceptions of language learning revealed that boys taught in single-sex groups for two years in one of her case study schools had the most favourable attitude to the subject. This interest was confirmed by pupils' option choices at fourteen; in 1983, 74%, twice the national average, opted to continue studying a language. Batters' methodology is, however, thorough in outlining the other possible determinants of pupils' attitudes. While the staff attributed this success to the stability of a department which had seen no changes in six years and which was receptive to new ideas, Batters points out that the proximity of an RAF base to the school meant that many children had lived abroad, or would have the opportunity to do so in the future and could, therefore, see the practical benefits of learning a language.

2.4 Conclusions

While the effectiveness of all-boys schools remains the topic of much debate, it is nevertheless apparent that the position of modern foreign languages within them may be inconsistent with the overall picture of GCSE attainment. Both statistics and independent studies suggest that boys may benefit from learning languages in single-sex classes. Just as it is clear, however, that any wholly reliable study of single-sex education should attempt to take into account all variables - social, economic and academic - which may affect pupil performance, it is equally evident that research into single-sex initiatives must adopt a similarly broad perspective. Recent research seems to have failed to supply the 'hard evidence' of single-sex schools' effectiveness which

may only be attained through in-depth, empirical work setting out to quantify and describe the impact of all variables on learning outcomes. If and when such data becomes available, its reliability will, of necessity, be restricted by the numerical disparity in the provision of mixed and single-sex schools.

A considerable proportion of the small number of published reports on single-sex initiatives, particularly those in the popular press, appear similarly flawed in attributing success exclusively to the segregated setting. More rigorous empirical studies have underlined the need to examine such initiatives in the broad context of multiple variables which may influence the outcomes: teaching strategies, the sex of the teacher; pupil attitudes to the subject; pupils' socio-economic backgrounds; the relationship between teacher and pupils; and pupils' and teachers' heightened awareness of gendered roles. Qualitative studies which do not aim to control or isolate these variables, but to describe and interpret them within the context of the individual school, could make a considerable contribution to research in this area. Chapters 6 and 7 set out to contribute in this way to the debate.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3. Introduction

This chapter describes the methods adopted by the researcher in order to investigate language learning in single-sex groups. Its objectives are twofold: to describe both the application of research methods and instruments and the reasons for their employment, with reference to traditional research paradigms, and to contextualise the empirical data obtained in schools. In attributing importance to the latter, the researcher recognises the extent to which research findings may be influenced by the means of investigation and that this background information is necessary to enable the reader to make a sound assessment of these findings.

The first part of the chapter examines the development of foreign and second language research methodology, especially in school-based contexts. It relates the increasing preference for qualitative approaches alongside traditional quantitative methods to a re-direction of focus - from the outcomes of language teaching and learning to the processes involved - and gives a brief, critical overview of the resulting tensions implicit in some methodological literature.

The second section describes the research design of this study. It acknowledges the influence of three central research paradigms and also outlines the way in which the design can be seen to deviate from orthodox implementation of the principles associated with them. It considers the study's application of three research instruments in the context of methodological literature and other empirical research.

The final section comprises a description of the five participating schools and modern languages departments in order to depict the context within which the single-sex groups were established.

3.1 The methodology of foreign language research

3.1.1 The nature and development of foreign language research

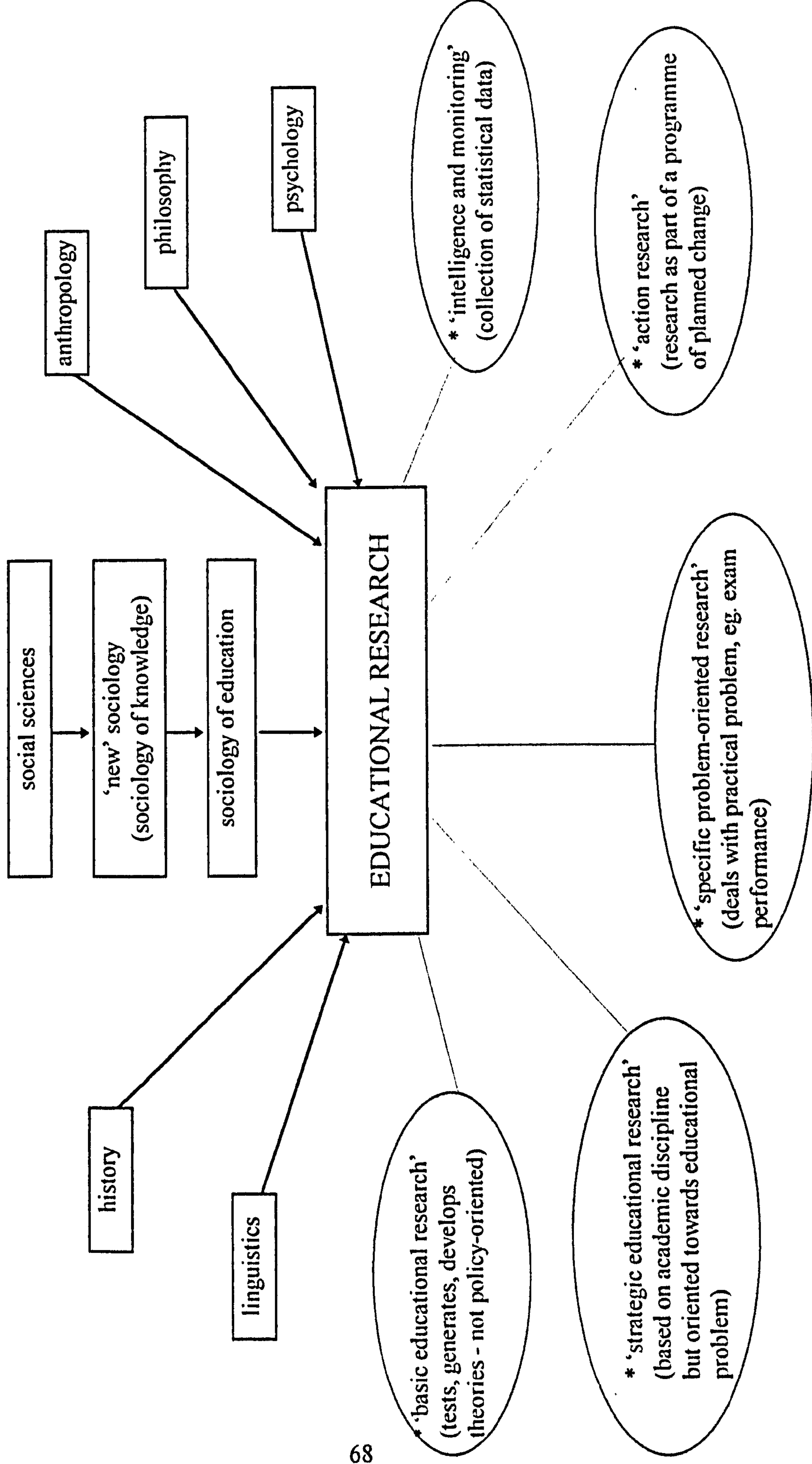
The term ‘foreign language research’ is often subsumed under the generic category ‘second language research’; methodology textbooks and research reviews habitually blur the distinction between the two. The term ‘second language’ usually connotes a language which is not foreign since the student is resident in a country where that language is the principal language spoken; hence, much second language research conducted in the UK focuses on the teaching and learning of English.

This conflation may well be regarded as a response to the paucity of foreign language research in comparison with other fields, a disparity sometimes highlighted in methodological texts (Alderson & Beretta, 1992). It is curious, however, that so few methodologists clarify the distinction, an omission which, given the contrasting features and conditions of each, may confuse the newcomer to the field. The present study describes itself as foreign, or modern, language research but employs the term second language research when citing primary sources that use the term. It should be noted that most texts on language teaching methodology focus on second language, as opposed to foreign language, research.

As a field within the broader discipline of educational research, foreign language teaching and learning research shares many of the diverse objectives and perspectives of its parent. Figure V illustrates both the multiple influences on educational research and, drawing on Burgess’s adaptation of Bulmer’s five-fold

FIGURE V

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



typology of social science (1978), its diverse forms. Like educational research, then, foreign language teaching and learning research is characterised by a heterogeneity of methods derived from disciplines such as sociology, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and psychology.

Research into foreign language teaching and learning as a discrete field represents a relatively new discipline. Its emergence in the 1960s coincided with the creation of a number of new universities and polytechnics and with the introduction of a foreign language to the curriculum of the newly-formed comprehensive schools (Johnstone & Trim, 1996). Registers of current research in Britain since then, published by CILT (Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research), record several shifts in the subject matter: from 1968-71, audio-lingual methodology; from 1971-86, foreign language teaching to primary pupils and bilingualism; in the 1980s, communicative methodology; and in the 1990s, a trend towards learner-centred studies (ibid, p.302-310). Underlying much research, even to the present day, is a central focus on outcomes, that is the inferred effectiveness of language teaching styles and settings.

3.1.2 Qualitative and quantitative approaches

Like educational research generally, the methodology of foreign and second language research is increasingly characterised by a diverse range of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Traditionally, research has tended towards the latter approach in order to undertake scientific evaluation of the teaching/learning process from an ostensibly 'objective' standpoint. Research of this kind employs traditional research instruments which aim to reduce personal bias in the collection and interpretation of data, such as non-participant observation and surveys. Both the

psychometric model, used in early evaluations of teaching, and interaction analysis, developed from a sociological paradigm in the mid 1960s, are strongly characterised by this 'positivistic' approach (Chaudron, 1988).

Many researchers have begun to question the central role played by quantitative methods, even in so-called 'evaluation research', undertaken frequently in the USA to assess language courses. The term 'evaluation', it is recognised, no longer implies mere quantification:

“One common misconception about evaluation which has implications for its methodology is that evaluation is synonymous with testing... Evaluation can be carried out without tests, and no doubt often should be.”

(Alderson in Alderson & Beretta, 1992, p.284)

Lynch similarly differentiates between evaluation and assessment, claiming that evaluation does not have to be limited to tests but can also incorporate qualitative methods such as unstructured interviews and observation (1996, p. 2). Such views endorse the employment of interpretive research designs which involve collecting qualitative, as well as quantitative, data that give insight into relationships, attitudes and motives. The approach is not experimental, as Lynch observes:

“The emphasis is on observing, describing, interpreting and understanding how events take place in the real world rather than in a controlled, laboratory-like setting.”

(Lynch, 1996, p. 14)

Many methodological textbooks are, however, still strongly influenced by quantitative principles although they often fail to acknowledge this. Brown's monograph, Understanding Research in Second Language Learning (1991) divides

research into two categories - case studies and statistical studies - but proceeds to elaborate primarily on the latter. Seliger and Shohamy's well-known work, Second Language Research Methods (1989) similarly exemplifies a tendency towards the application of scientific methods. In some instances, the difficulty inherent in reconciling quantitative with qualitative methods is revealed through inconsistent argumentation. Beretta, for instance, opines:

“Standardisation of classroom events...cannot be accomplished in the field, over time, with real teachers and all manner of real-world intrusions.”

(in Alderson & Beretta, 1992, p.12)

His critique of thirty-three published second language evaluation studies is, however, based on the assertion that they do not adequately address traditionally quantitative criteria: the samples are too small or large, there is no representative sampling, and there is a lack of control over the teacher variable (p.9-12). ‘Real’ classroom events, it seems, must nevertheless be forced into an objective evaluation framework.

Chaudron is more candid in expressing his scepticism about the reliability and validity of qualitative data:

“...many researchers adopting a process-oriented or descriptive, qualitative approach have appeared primarily to rely on the vividness and logic of their descriptions and inferences as confirmation of the validity of the descriptions. Yet this can hardly be justified merely by asserting the ‘interpretive’ or subjective nature of the qualitative endeavor.”

(Chaudron, 1988, p. 23)

This scepticism should, however, be placed in the context of the positivistic predilection which permeates the book. Chaudron's interpretation of unsound research

methodology is founded on positivistic terms such as ‘ungeneralizable results’; the absence of ‘random sampling of teachers or students’; and the lack of ‘reliable instrumentation’, such as observation schedules (p.10-11).

3.1.3 Ethnographic studies

A number of researchers advocate more open approaches which recognise that language learning is a social as well as a cognitive process. In her evaluation of classroom interaction, Slimani, for example, writes:

“...one might argue that attempting to measure learning at the end of a lesson implies a narrow definition of what language learning involves.”

(Slimani, 1992, p.199)

In seeking to examine “the quality of interaction” she backed up observation and audio recordings of language lessons with twice-weekly interviews with the students in which she invited them to expand on their responses to questionnaires completed previously. This approach exemplifies a re-direction of focus, practised by increasing numbers of researchers, from the outcome of the language lesson to the process. Since the language lesson is regarded as a ‘co-production’ (Slimani, p. 198; Allwright, 1988, p. 256), insofar as the students’ agendas and dispositions influence the teacher and their plan, the researcher must also probe the students’ perceptions of what and how they learn. This differential perspective on interaction goes beyond the parameters of the conventional quantitative approach. When, as Breen argues (in Allwright, 1988, p. 249), researchers begin to consider the social as well as the cognitive aspects of language learning, their role should resemble more closely that of anthropologists, rather than that of statisticians, who set out to investigate the culture which is the language class. The case is thus made for the role of the ethnography.

The ethnographer “enters into the daily life of those who are being studied” (Burgess, 1993, p. 77) not only to observe, through ‘participant observation’, but also to explore the perceptions of those under study through unstructured and informal interviews. No attempt is generally made to control variables; rather, efforts are made to maintain a holistic perspective which takes into account the broad context of the social, or classroom, setting.

Van Lier is an exponent of ethnographic second language research which deliberately estranges itself from scientific methods on the grounds that they fail to provide a holistic perspective:

“The price that is paid for scientific control is an inevitable neglect of the social context of the interaction between teachers and learners. Without this social context it is difficult to see how classroom interaction can be understood and what cause-effect relationships, if they can ever be conclusively established, really mean.”

(van Lier, 1990, p.xiv)

This so-called ‘naturalistic’ approach clearly re-defines the researcher’s aim; rather than identifying correlations, (s)he seeks to understand them. The case for this broader approach is underpinned by the inscrutability of the language teaching/learning processes under investigation, as Littlewood notes:

“Research into second language acquisition is a comparatively new field and there are still considerable gaps in our knowledge....we are still a long way from being able to pinpoint the precise features of the interactions that take place between learners and teachers which cause learning to take place most effectively.”

(Littlewood, 1984, p.99)

The gradual move away from experimentation focusing on a quantifiable end-product (student achievement), towards description and analysis of the process (Lynch, 1996, p. 39) is also being reflected in a growing number of publications which contain researchers' autobiographical accounts of the research process (see, for instance, Alderson & Beretta, 1992). This emergence of researcher reflexivity parallels the development in educational research in general (see Burgess, 1985; Walford, 1991) and represents a response to fears that the quantifiable evidence yielded by purely quantitative methods is unreliable in failing to take account of many other important variables which may affect the subject, including the researcher's visible, or implied, presence.

Allwright's 'faith in the observable' has, then, ostensibly superseded the 'faith in the measurable' (1988) of the 1960s. It is worth noting, however, that educational research in general may be under pressure from governmental policies which favour the quantitative measurement of pupils' attainment through the collation of external examination results. The danger of research assuming a restrictive focus is, perhaps, even greater in a discipline which can often be seen as threatened by cultural and pedagogical marginalisation.

3.2 The research methodology of this study

3.2.1 The research design and its relation to traditional approaches

The research design was principally informed by the research opportunities available, rather than adhering rigidly from the outset to conventional research models. Thus, the study employs a range of qualitative approaches selected both to give some detailed insight into the individual characteristics of each single-sex group and school, and to accommodate the difficulty of working with several schools, all at the same

time, who were interested in exploring single-sex groupings in modern foreign languages. The study consequently reflects some of the problems of working with real schools in real time.

The research design employs elements of three methods traditionally used in educational research: the ethnography, the case study and action research. It cannot, however, be seen to meet exactly the defining criteria of any of these as they are stipulated in some methodological texts.

The study is characterised by a number of features often associated with ethnography. It fulfils unequivocally Delamont's broad interpretation of this design term as a study that uses qualitative methods (Delamont, 1992), and takes into account the broader context of the educational setting within which the initiatives were implemented. It seeks to obtain 'inside information' and explore the perceptions of the teachers and pupils under study through observation and interviews. The methods employed in classroom observation seem to comply with Mercer's requirements that an ethnography demonstrates an interest in the minutiae of speech and behaviours (Mercer, 1991, p. 49). It does not, however, quite meet the standards set by Measor and Woods (1991, p. 60) for claiming to be pure ethnography; while remaining open to the emergence of new hypotheses and patterns, the design did not set out completely void of specific questions or problems.

While it shares some features of case study research, the study does not share one of the principal aims of the case study as outlined by Cohen and Manion which is to:

“...probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which it belongs.”

(Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 106-7)

The possibility of undertaking a longitudinal study, as implied in the use of the term 'life cycle', is precluded from this study by the necessity of studying single-sex classes established under the auspices and at the instigation of individual schools. The researcher consequently had little control over the duration of initiatives which was determined by the schools' own agendas and by their own perception of the effectiveness of the setting policy. In this respect the design is, however, compatible with Yin's emphasis on "a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" where "the investigator has little control over events" (Yin, 1989, p. 13).

Cohen and Manion's implicit suggestion that the case study investigates a single unit is equally inappropriate in this design where the objective has a comparative aspect; it aims to utilize fully the opportunity of surveying several groups of different ages and abilities experiencing differential teaching strategies. A straightforward comparison between these groups is, not, however, possible given the multiple differences between schools. Where comparisons are drawn, these differential variables are taken into account, and, where they are considered to have exercised a major influence on the group, they are related in more detail. Rose's exposition of the case study seems more fitting; he acknowledges the potential advantages of using multiple cases which, he says, may be investigated in either snapshot or longitudinal studies (Rose, 1991).

Moreover, the study does not wholly purport to "establish generalizations" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 106-7). Rather, it aims to explore in some depth the features of the groups and the learning that takes place in them, in order to "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 1989, p. 14). Given that each of the five schools was piloting segregation on a different scale and with

different year groups, it is essential to recognise the individual nature of each group in data analysis, endeavouring to take into account all variables which may have influenced the participants' experiences.

The study design shares some common ground with the principles of action research. This is particularly the case with regard to two aspects of the study: the initial stimulus for the single-sex initiatives, that is the recognition of a problem and the need for change, and the nature of the researcher's relationship with the teachers under observation.

There are obvious similarities between the study and the GIST project described earlier. Like the GIST project, the research has an interest in improving practice so that boys are enabled to maximise their academic potential in modern languages. Unlike GIST, however, the study did not set out to make improvements through the direct intervention of the researcher; decisions regarding setting and teaching strategies were ultimately made by senior management, departmental heads and teachers. The study does not meet Elliot's strict criteria which subjugate findings in favour of improvement:

"The fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge. The production and utilization of knowledge is subordinate to, and conditioned by, this fundamental aim."

(Elliott, 1991, p. 49)

The researcher's relationship with the teachers can, however, be seen to some extent to qualify the use of the term 'action research' since it can generally be described as "collaborative" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 186). Teaching strategies were frequently the topic of discussions between the researcher and those teachers responsible for all-boys groups. This was usually on an informal basis, often pre- and

post-lesson observation. Some teachers also attended INSET workshops facilitated by the researcher out of school in response to teacher interest in effective strategies for teaching boys. It should be made clear, however, that such training courses were not specifically directed at the teachers involved in the project. While the researcher's function in this respect varied from teacher to teacher, according to the level of interest expressed by individuals in the researcher's knowledge of successful strategies, none of the relationships could be seen to meet the Stenhousean criterion of action research - the teacher-researcher partnership.

The level of researcher semi-participation which developed during this study may be viewed by some as a threat to the validity of the data. The researcher regards it as, perhaps, an innovative departure in research methodology - an interactive monitoring of pedagogical practice by a practitioner. It was felt that some level of intervention was unavoidable given the growing demands on teachers to improve boys' academic performance; this external pressure was, in four out of the five cases, the principal reason for executing the initiative. It should be remembered that researcher subjectivity is accommodated in a reflexive, qualitative design which aims to depict in some detail real world experiences.

3.2.2 The research methods

The research was conducted on the premise that the methods selected should be the most appropriate for revealing the kind of data and insight in which the researcher is interested (Burgess, 1985b, p. 3). Van Lier draws a neat distinction between research which seeks proof, and research which seeks to understand (Van Lier, 1990, p. xiv). Since this study falls into the latter category, the aim being to explore pupil and teacher experiences within the new setting, the approach is predominantly qualitative.

The study uses descriptive methods, the purpose of which is succinctly defined by Cohen and Manion (1994, p.67) as “to describe and to interpret what is.” Multiple methods are employed: group and individual interviews; a range of questionnaires incorporating both open-ended and closed questions; classroom observation; and informal discussion. The application of each of these instruments within the study is described in greater detail in the sections below. The findings of each have been triangulated in order to provide a means of internal validation and to construct a more comprehensive picture. As Batters (1988, p.82) has highlighted, triangulation also serves an important function in reducing bias which may be a matter of some concern in projects conducted by a single researcher.

3.2.3 The research schedule

Figure VI gives an outline of the research schedule from April 1995 to July 1998. The preliminary investigations were followed by fieldwork carried out over a period of 25 months. The fieldwork fell into two discrete phases, Research Phase 1 and Research Phase 2. Each of these three stages – Preliminary Research Phase, Research Phase 1 and Research Phase 2 - is described below.

3.2.3.1 Preliminary Research Phase

The initial stage of the research comprised a review of recent research examining the possible reasons for boys’ underachievement in modern languages. On the basis of the conclusions drawn at this preliminary stage, which suggested considerable differences between boys’ and girls’ attitudes to modern languages and learning styles, the focus was re-directed to boys learning modern languages in single-sex teaching groups. This decision resulted from the researcher’s interest in

FIGURE VI

AN OUTLINE OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH PHASE

DATE	RESEARCH ACTIVITY	SCHOOL(S) INVOLVED	YEAR GROUP INVOLVED	MIXED/ SINGLE-SEX
April 1995 - December 1995	Preliminary research into possible reasons for boys' underachievement (literature review)			
December 1995	Search for schools implementing/planning to implement a single-sex policy in MFL			
January 1996	Telephone contact with 3 departments already teaching single-sex groups.	A B C	Y10 Y7 Y8	
February 1996	Initial visits to schools to interview Heads of Department and observe all-boys classes. Pupil questionnaire 1 piloted on mixed groups.	A B C A B C	Y10 Y7 Y8 Y10 Y7 & Y9 Y8	Mixed
April 1996	School D expressed interest in teaching single-sex groups from September. Discussions with Head, Equal Opps. Representative and department on implementation.	D		

RESEARCH PHASE 1

DATE	RESEARCH ACTIVITY	SCHOOL(S) INVOLVED	YEAR GROUP INVOLVED	MIXED/ SINGLE-SEX
June 1996	Administration of Pupil questionnaire 1.	B D	Y8 Y8	Mixed
July 1996	Administration of Pupil questionnaire 2 administered. Interviews with 3 or 4 boys and girls	A B C A B C	Y10 Y7 8 10 Y7 Y8	Mixed & single-sex Mixed & single-sex Single-sex Single-sex Single-sex Single-sex
December 1996	Interviews with pupils being taught French and German by the same teacher, in single-sex and mixed groups respectively	B	Y7	Mixed & single-sex
February 1997	Second interviews with pupils Administration of pupil questionnaire 2	D D	Y9 Y9	Single-sex Single-sex
June - July 1997	Administration of pupil questionnaire 3 to all pupils in single-sex groups and to their peers in mixed groups, either in the same year group, or in the year above/below them. Pupil interviews Administration of teacher questionnaire Group interviews with staff	A B C D A,B,C,D A,B,C,D	Y11 Y7 Y8 Y9 Y9 Y8 Y9 Y11 Y8 Y9 Y9	Mixed & single-sex Mixed Single-sex Mixed & single-sex Single-sex Mixed Single-sex Single-sex Single-sex Single-sex

RESEARCH PHASE 2

DATE	RESEARCH ACTIVITY	SCHOOL(S) INVOLVED	YEAR GROUP INVOLVED	MIXED/ SINGLE-SEX
September 1997 - May 1998	Observation of 3 higher-ability all-boys groups	D	Y8	Single-sex
		E	Y9	Single-sex
			10	Single-sex
October 1997	Pupil questionnaire 2 administered.	D	Y8	Single-sex
		E	Y9 Y10	Single-sex Single-sex
December 1997	Interviews with 4 boys	D	Y8	Single-sex
		E	Y9 Y10	Single-sex Single-sex
June - July 1998	Second interviews with 4 boys Interviews with teachers Administration of teacher questionnaire Administration of pupil questionnaire 4 to boys and girls	D	Y8	Single-sex
		E	Y9	Single-sex
		D & E	Y10	Single-sex
		D & E		Mixed & single-sex
		D	Y8 Y9 Y10	Single-sex Single-sex Single-sex

investigating both boys' learning styles, and teaching strategies which could be seen as particularly effective in raising achievement. It was felt that boys' interests could be better accommodated in a single-sex group, and that this would eliminate the danger of girls being marginalised or disadvantaged by the employment of 'boy-friendly' teaching strategies. All-boys groups within co-educational comprehensive schools were selected for study since it was recognised that the selection procedure, and grammar school history, common to many single-sex schools could corrupt the findings by introducing further significant variables. Media coverage also suggested a growing number of schools experimenting with single-sex groups as a response to Ofsted's, and the Government's, demands to raise standards of achievement.

A decision was made to contact schools which were already implementing a single-sex policy in modern languages, or planning to do so, and invite their participation in a short-term empirical research project. A notice was placed in the newsletter of the Association for Language Learning appealing for such schools to make contact, and a request for information circulated to a national sample of advisers and inspectors.

After identifying three departments already teaching single-sex groups, initial visits were made to the schools in February 1996 to interview the respective heads of department about their reasons for segregating and to observe some of the groups involved. These schools are subsequently referred to as Schools A, B and C.

In April 1996 a fourth school, School D, expressed interest in establishing single-sex teaching groups in the following academic year. Discussions were held with the Headmaster, Equal Opportunities representative and the modern languages department on the implications and possible benefits of segregation.

3.2.3.2 Fieldwork

The ensuing fieldwork was carried out over a period of 25 months, from June 1996 to July 1998, with five schools selected on the basis of opportunity sampling. It was not possible to research the same groups of pupils, and the same teachers, for the entire duration of this period. After one year of teaching languages in single-sex groups, most of the groups were re-formed, and in some cases dissolved, in accordance with individual schools' timetable and curriculum requirements, and on the basis of the teachers' evaluations of their effectiveness in raising pupil achievement. School A's single-sex groups, for instance, comprised pupils in Year 11 who left school in July 1997. Although the modern languages staff were hoping to form single-sex groups in the new cohort of Year 7 pupils the following September, this was made impossible by timetabling restraints.

The fieldwork was, consequently, conducted in two discrete phases, with the second phase requiring a change of focus. Research Phase 1 focused on four schools, A, B, C and D, and Research Phase 2 on three all-boys groups within two schools, D and E. All of the research schools taught modern languages to single-sex classes for at least one academic year.

3.2.3.3 Research Phase 1

Research Phase 1 ran from April 1996 to July 1997 and involved working with Schools A, B, C and D. This time was principally spent administering three questionnaires to pupils and one to staff, and conducting interviews with both. Figure VII illustrates when the questionnaires and interviews were completed and how many pupils were involved in each school. The administration, content and analysis of the

FIGURE VII **RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS APPLIED, AND NUMBER OF PUPILS INVOLVED, IN**

RESEARCH PHASE 1 (June, 1996 - July, 1997)

School A

INSTRUMENT	DATE	YEAR GROUP	NUMBER OF BOYS	NUMBER OF GIRLS	TOTAL
Pupil questionnaire 2	July, 1996	10	95	96	191
Pupil questionnaire 3	June - July, 1997	11	113	117	230
Interview	July, 1996	10	4	4	8

School B

INSTRUMENT	DATE	YEAR GROUP	NUMBER OF BOYS	NUMBER OF GIRLS	TOTAL
Pupil questionnaire 1	June, 1996	8	65	70	135
Pupil questionnaire 2	July, 1996	7	60	81	141
Pupil questionnaire 3	June - July, 1997	7	63	77	140
Pupil questionnaire 3	June - July, 1997	8	53	59	112
Interview	July, 1996	7	4	4	8
Interview	December, 1996	7	4	4	8
Interview	December, 1996	8	8	8	16

School C

INSTRUMENT	DATE	YEAR GROUP	NUMBER OF BOYS	NUMBER OF GIRLS	TOTAL
Pupil questionnaire 2	July 1996	8	64	55	119
Interview	July 1996	8	4	4	8
Pupil questionnaire 3	June - July 1997	8	24	25	49
Pupil questionnaire 3	June - July 1997	9	31	26	57

School D

INSTRUMENT	DATE	YEAR GROUP	NUMBER OF BOYS	NUMBER OF GIRLS	TOTAL
Pupil questionnaire 1	June 1996	8	67	86	153
Pupil questionnaire 2	July 1996	8	28	33	61
Interview	July 1996	8	4	4	8
Pupil questionnaire 2	February 1997	9	71	88	159
Interview	February 1997	9	4	4	8
Pupil questionnaire 3	June - July 1997	8	40	40	80
Pupil questionnaire 3	June - July 1997	9	51	73	124

questionnaires, and the interview process, are described in more detail later in the chapter.

3.2.3.4 Research phase 2

Research phase 2 ran from September 1997 to July 1998. During this time classroom observation of three higher-ability all-boys groups in Years 8, 9 and 10 was undertaken in two local schools. The two classes in Years 8 and 9 were taught by two teachers in School D which had been involved in Research Phase 1. The Year 10 group was found in a fifth school, School E, which had earlier expressed an interest in becoming involved in the research.

These two schools were selected on the basis of their locality. The decision to involve a fifth school, School E, in the research was made on the basis that Schools A, B and C were both too far away from the researcher's base to allow for frequent observation and that the groups monitored in Research Phase 1 in these schools no longer existed. The introduction of a fifth school at this stage was not viewed as a particular disadvantage, since a linear progression of the research methodology had been made impossible anyway by the changed composition of the original groups. The arrival of School E was, rather, seen as a welcome opportunity to use a different research method - classroom observation - to validate and investigate in greater depth some of those features which had emerged in Research Phase 1.

Each of the three groups was observed for around nine hours and informal discussions were held with teachers before and after these lessons. A small number of other classes, including some of the parallel girls' groups, were also occasionally observed as a means of providing contrast. Two questionnaires were administered to

each of the boys', and the corresponding girls' groups, and interviews conducted with a small number of the boys and girls and their teachers. Figure VIII illustrates when each of these instruments was applied during Research Phase 2 and the number of pupils who were involved in each of the two schools.

3.2.3.5 INSET workshops

Several workshops for teachers, on raising boys' achievement, were held around the country during these two years of fieldwork, and two of these were attended by Heads of Department from the study schools. While not strictly an integral part of the research methodology, these enabled the researcher to gain an impression of a large number of teachers' views on the issue of boys' underachievement and to hear of their own effective teaching strategies.

3.2.4 The questionnaire as a research tool

The questionnaire is usually identified as a survey research method, although it is also frequently used in qualitative studies where triangulation is being applied. Questionnaires may test theories, gauge opinions and attitudes and measure trends. The format varies widely; unstructured questionnaires include open-ended questions, or sentence completion tasks, while structured questionnaires generally give the respondents a number of answers to choose from. Questionnaires often use a representative sample to depict or rationalise the features of a wider population (May, 1997, p. 82). Where this is the case, careful sampling should be carried out beforehand to select the recipients of the questionnaire. When groups suggest themselves for investigation, by virtue of possessing a feature of interest to the researcher, as is the case in this study, the researcher applies opportunity sampling.

FIGURE VIII RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS APPLIED, AND NUMBER OF PUPILS INVOLVED, IN

RESEARCH PHASE 2 (September, 1997 - July, 1998)

School D

INSTRUMENT	DATE	YEAR GROUP	NUMBER OF BOYS	NUMBER OF GIRLS	TOTAL
Observation	September, 1997- June, 1998	10	23	0	23
Pupil questionnaire 2	October, 1997	10	25	26	51
Interview	December, 1997	10	4	4	8
Pupil questionnaire 4	June, 1998	10	21	22	43
Interview	July, 1998	10	4	4	8

School E

INSTRUMENT	DATE	YEAR GROUP	NUMBER OF BOYS	NUMBER OF GIRLS	TOTAL
Observation	September 1997- June 1998	8	23	25	48
Observation	September 1997- June 1998	9	22	24	46
Pupil questionnaire 2	October 1997	8	23	31	54
Pupil questionnaire 2	October 1997	9	19	23	42
Interview	December 1997	9	4	4	8
Pupil questionnaire 4	June 1998	8	21	26	47
Pupil questionnaire 4	June 1998	9	18	24	42
Interview	July 1998	8	4	4	8
Interview	July 1998	9	4	4	8

The advantages of administering questionnaires are numerous: they represent a means of collecting data on a large scale; they are relatively easy and inexpensive to administer; the data acquired is fairly accessible because of the uniformity of the format, and analysis can be facilitated through using one of any number of software packages designed specially for that purpose. May (op. cit.) highlights two further important benefits: anonymity, of particular importance when dealing with sensitive topics, and, in this particular case, with adolescents unsure of the implications of expressing their opinions on school-related issues; and the fact that respondents can complete them, more or less, in their own time. O'Connell Davidson and Layder also recognise the appeal to funding bodies and the media of the 'hard' data yielded by questionnaires, which may make them more attractive to researchers (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994, p. 86).

The disadvantages of questionnaires should, however, also be considered. The validity of the data is easily threatened by incomplete or inaccurate responses or a poor rate of return. Analysed independently, the data yielded may give a misleading picture of complex phenomena. As Batters points out, the time at which the questionnaire is administered may influence the responses:

“...in the case of foreign language study, international relations with the country of the target language and subsequent media comment will have an effect on response.”

(Batters, 1988, p. 57)

As the results may be skewed by the bias inherent in the researcher's design of the questionnaire, particular care should be taken over the wording of clear, unambiguous questions. Cohen and Manion warn against using questions that use

negative, or leading, questions that may lead the respondent to a desired conclusion, are highbrow, or irritating (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 93). Such risks should be reduced by piloting the questionnaire on a small sample and, where possible, interviewing the respondents on their answers. In opportunity samples where the respondents are aware that they are the focus of special interest because they are involved in an initiative as in this case, the reliability of data is also threatened by the ‘halo effect’ described in more detail in Section 3.2.5.2.

As Seliger and Shohamy have observed, questionnaires are often used in second language research both to collect background information about language learners, such as age and their experience of languages, which may affect their language learning ability, and also to gather data on phenomena such as motivation, attitudes and self-concepts which are not easily observed (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p. 172).

3.2.4.1 The use of the questionnaire in this study

The study makes use of four different questionnaires, all of which are reproduced in the appendix. Figure VI, referred to in Section 3.2.3, gives an overview of when the questionnaires were administered within the research schedule. The researcher was able to administer most of the questionnaires, but in the few cases where this was not possible staff were briefed on how the questionnaires should be presented to pupils, and guidance given on how potential pupil queries should be answered. Where pupils claimed to have no experience of the activities listed on questionnaires, for instance, it was made clear that they should nevertheless give a hypothetical response.

3.2.4.2 Questionnaires administered during Research Phase 1

Pupil Questionnaire 1 lists a wide range of typical classroom activities and was intended as a preliminary audit to evaluate differences in boys' and girls' learning preferences. It does not address the issue of single-sex grouping. It was first piloted in February 1996 on a small number of boys and girls in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 from Schools A, B and C. At this stage the schools had only just agreed to take part in the research and so the questionnaire was seen by the researcher as a means of launching the project and engaging the teachers' interest in the research. Each school was also offered a summary of the responses given by their pupils.

Analysis of these responses suggested that pupil differences were most likely to emerge in Years 8-9 and, on the basis of this discovery, it was decided to invite pupils at the end of Year 8 to complete the questionnaire. It was subsequently administered in June 1996 to 132 boys and 156 girls in Year 8 from mixed teaching groups in Schools B and D. These schools were selected on the basis of the departmental heads' willingness to help administer them and on the grounds that the Year 8 pupils asked to complete them were likely to participate in the research investigating their learning in single-sex groups from September of that year.

Pupil Questionnaire 2 was completed by all pupils in the year groups from Schools A, B and C involved in the project, whether in mixed or single-sex groups, in July 1996. This is a short questionnaire, consisting of three or four questions, which focuses both on pupils' perceptions of languages and their responses to the mixed or single-sex group in which they were being taught. Pupils in mixed groups were also asked for their views on the prospect of being taught in a single-sex group. The

questionnaire includes a sentence completion task which invites pupils to elaborate on their answers and which served as an internal reliability control.

The same questionnaire was also distributed in July 1996 to a smaller number of School D's pupils. It had been hoped that, as in Schools A, B and C, the whole year would complete the questionnaire but, owing to numerous changes and long-term absence in the modern languages department, the responses were limited to only two classes. Since, at that stage, these Year 8 pupils in School D represented the only cohort with whom the researcher would have contact both before and after they were re-grouped into single-sex classes, it was decided to re-issue the same questionnaire some months into the initiative. This was undertaken to allow the researcher to establish to what extent the pupils' earlier expectations of language learning in a single-sex group matched their later experiences. The questionnaire was thus administered first in July 1996, shortly after the pupils in Year 8 had been informed of the changes to take place in September, and then re-issued to pupils in the same cohort, then in Year 9, six months into the initiative, in February 1997.

The opinions expressed in Pupil Questionnaire 2, particularly in the free writing section, and the data collected from interviews, informed the design of **Pupil Questionnaire 3**, issued in June-July 1997 to Schools A, B, C and D. This comprises a three-point attitudinal scale and examines not only pupils' reactions to the setting arrangement but also variables such as integrative and instrumental motivation, genderised perceptions of the subject, and social and cultural background. It is based on a questionnaire designed by Batters to test pupils' perceptions of language learning (Batters, 1988). The same variable is tested in a number of different statements in order to provide a degree of internal reliability.

In Schools A and C, where there were only two single-sex groups, the questionnaire was completed by all pupils who had been taught in single-sex groups for at least one year and by their peers in mixed groups who were in the same year group. In Schools B and D, where the whole year group was segregated, the year group below or above them, who were being taught in mixed groups, also completed the questionnaire. In the absence of mixed control groups this enabled some comparison of the attitudes of those pupils taught in single-sex groups with those from mixed groups within the same school.

3.2.4.3 Questionnaires administered during Research Phase 2

Two questionnaires were completed by all of the boys in the higher ability classes in Years 8, 9 and 10 who were observed during the second Research Phase, and by their female counterparts in the parallel all-girls groups.

Pupil Questionnaire 2, described above, was administered twice, once towards the beginning of the school year in early October when the pupils had had only a few language lessons in their new single-sex groups, and again at the end of the year in June, when it formed part of **Pupil Questionnaire 4**, described below. This allowed the researcher to trace any developments in the pupils' attitudes towards the single-sex grouping during the academic year.

Pupil Questionnaire 4 was administered in June 1998 to the three all-boys classes who had been observed, and to the parallel girls' groups. The first part of the questionnaire comprises an abridged version of **Pupil Questionnaire 1**. It lists those classroom activities which were suggested by analysis of the results of **Questionnaire 1** to be most likely to gain differential responses from boys and girls. It also asks for pupils' responses to a range of factors relating to the teaching and learning

environment which emerged from interviews and earlier questionnaires as potentially important. The second part of the questionnaire is a duplicate of Pupil Questionnaire 2 which these pupils first completed in October 1997.

3.2.4.4 Analysis of the questionnaire data

A software package was used to collate and analyse all questionnaire responses. Factor analysis was applied: questions from the four pupil questionnaires which addressed the same issue, such as pupils' enjoyment of single-sex groups, were identified and the responses to these analysed and compared. Comparisons were then drawn which took account of numerous variables including age, gender, school, group and pupils' exposure to the language abroad. These findings were then compared with the findings of interviews, observation and informal discussion on the same issues. In this way, the analysis of the data collected took a holistic approach, looking at the relationship between variables. The responses gathered in the early stages of the research suggested the possibility that attitude-determining factors other than the single-sex setting could emerge as equally, or more, significant and it was felt that these should not, therefore, be ignored.

3.2.4.4 The Teacher Questionnaire

A **Teacher Questionnaire** was also completed by all modern languages staff from the case study schools when they had completed at least one year of teaching single-sex groups. The questionnaires were administered at the end of the summer term 1997 to teachers in Schools A, B, C and D and at the end of the summer term 1998 to teachers in School D who had been observed and to those in School E. Each teacher completed only one questionnaire.

The questionnaire was piloted on a small sample of teachers from other schools who were unrelated to the project, or who were known to have considered single-sex setting. The questionnaire focuses on teachers' experiences and views of single-sex teaching and examines other variables such as their expectations of pupils, teaching methods and perceptions of pupils' attitudes to the subject. A number of the statements reflect statements included in Pupil Questionnaire 3 and allow a comparison between pupils' and teachers' views. While the pupils were given only three response categories to choose from, however, the teachers were given five. Earlier piloting of questionnaires with pupils, and subsequent informal discussions with them, had suggested that many pupils, particularly those in Year 7, had experienced some difficulty selecting from five categories in response to such a large number of questions. Given that many pupils, especially boys, seemed to opt after minimum reflection for the extremes of the response range anyway, and to reduce the risk of pupils' concentration waning, it was decided to reduce the response categories to three and to instruct pupils not to spend too long thinking about their responses. The teacher respondents to the pilot questionnaire, however, who completed it in their own time and at their own pace, clearly invested some considerable time and thought in their responses, suggested by the number of comments which were made in addition to ticking boxes. It was, therefore, decided to retain the five response categories on the Teachers' Questionnaire.

Analysis of the data compares the attitudes of teachers with experience of teaching single-sex groups with those of their colleagues in the same schools teaching mixed groups. As with the pupil questionnaires, all of the teachers' questionnaire responses were analysed in conjunction with interview, observation and informal discussion data.

3.2.5 The interview as a research tool

The interview represents a popular means of accessing data directly from those under study, 'face-to-face'. It is particularly popular with qualitative researchers and ethnographers as a means of investigating in reasonable depth the perceptions of those under study, and is also commonly used as a vehicle to pose questions about data obtained previously through observation.

3.2.5.1 The interview format

The format of the interview depends principally on the researcher's approach. In general, the greater the positivistic tendencies of the research design, the more tightly-structured the interview will be. At its most extreme, the structured interview is rather like a verbal questionnaire in which, instead of ticking boxes, the interviewee responds positively or negatively to closed questions. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the unstructured interview resembles an informal conversation which is allowed to run its own course within general parameters set by the interviewer. There are, of course, many formats positioned at intervals along this continuum, and located half-way is the semi-structured interview in which pre-formulated questions may be modified, omitted or extended during the interview as the interviewer responds to the themes which emerge and the respondent's characteristics.

Powney and Watts' distinction between interview formats is based not on the kinds of questions asked, but on the relative control exercised by the interviewer and interviewee. In 'respondent' interviewing the interviewer sets the agenda and controls the content; in 'informant' interviewing the interview is non-directive, and the agenda is largely determined by the interviewee (Powney & Watts, 1987).

3.2.5.2 The reliability of interviews

The popularity of the interview in research projects should not be seen as a testament to its reliability. Views expressed in interviews should not be equated with the unequivocal truth, since many mitigating factors may influence the interviewee's contributions. For many people, especially children, the microphone and tape recorder may either generate anxiety, particularly if this is the first time they have been recorded, or it may encourage them to entertain with exaggerated accounts. The privilege of being selected for interview may induce the 'halo effect', with interviewees responding in a way which they perceive to be acceptable to the interviewer. This is, in the researcher's experience, a particular hazard in interviewing pupils, since it is extremely difficult to invite a pupil to leave the class for an interview discreetly, without the rest of the class, and hence the interviewee themselves, interpreting this as special treatment.

The interviewer her-/himself plays an important part in defining the quality of the interview. (S)he should, above all, be a good listener, recognising when to remain silent, and when to initiate dialogue. Questions should be carefully planned and worded to avoid colouring responses, and a careful balance needs to be maintained between open and closed questions. Even if all of these criteria are met, some degree of bias is inevitable. Cohen and Manion list the following possible sources of bias: interviewer and interviewee characteristics; the attitudes and opinions of the interviewer; "a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in her own image"; the interviewer's desire for responses to support her theories; misunderstanding of the questions and responses; colour; religion; class and age (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 282). It is of interest that the sex of the interviewer is omitted from this list since it was felt in the

current study of boys that the researcher's female identity, and possibly youthfulness, did not go unnoticed by the interviewees. At its extreme, this manifested itself on one occasion in the form of lewd suggestions made by a boy in the corridor outside the interview room to those being interviewed.

The venue of interviews may also influence the data collected. All of the interviews in this study took place in school, during the school day, in classrooms or offices. It is not inconceivable that different data would have been collected out of school, with the pupils relieved not only of school uniform but of all the tacit expectations of authority which are associated with the school environs. One should also bear in mind the pupils' association of the researcher with the teaching staff, a point clarified in the section below on observation.

3.2.5.3 The interviewer-interviewee relationship

The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is crucial in determining the reliability and quantity of data; the importance of this relationship in determining the interview's format is, it seems, often omitted or underestimated in methodological literature. Ideally, a balance needs to be achieved between the researchers' detachment and their affability towards the interviewees. In reality, however, the individual circumstances of the researcher sometimes render this untenable, and the balance is often unavoidably weighted on the side of intimacy. The adoption of a more intimate stance should not be automatically criticised for introducing bias. Vincent recalls how the female subjects of her study became more willing to share information with her when they discovered that she was pregnant. This shared area of experience connected her with them and eradicated some of the barriers

erected previously when they had associated her with their tutor (Vincent & Warren, 1998).

Feminist researchers advocate this intimacy, particularly with female respondents. During repeated interviewing of fifty-five women before and after pregnancy Oakley found that she was cast in the role of “someone who could not only reassure but inform” (Oakley 1981, p. 43). She found that it was unethical to refuse the interviewees her support, by insisting on a neutral, passive role, and so concluded:

“...the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.”

(ibid, p. 41)

Like many researchers, she also perceived that her respondents were empowered by their experience of talking to her, since they were encouraged to reflect on their own lives.

3.2.5.4 Interviews with pupils

While adult interviews with pupils are a common occurrence in educational research, the increased difficulty experienced in comparison with interviewing adults does not appear well-documented in methodological textbooks addressing educational research issues. Cohen and Manion (1994), for instance, do not include any reference to the particular problems and seem to be unaware of the difficulties encountered if one applies their interviewing guidelines to interviews with children. Their recommendation of non-specific questions, on the grounds that they generate greater honesty, for instance, does not seem to take into account the fact that many children

lack the overview, or cognitive ability, to answer such questions. The researcher's own, apparently uncomplicated, question to pupils, "What do you enjoy in lessons?" often caused considerable difficulty.

Several of the problems identified by Simons as peculiar to pupil interviews were encountered in this research, particularly the difficulty experienced by pupils in articulating their views (Simons 1981, p. 38-43). A lack of interest in the research subject may produce a plethora of irrelevant, or unhelpful, comments; "It's boring" was a frequent response both in this study and Simons'. While adults have the advantage of greater experience, and thus may find it easier to reflect on issues, many children are unaccustomed to analysis of their own thoughts and ideas. This is, perhaps, particularly the case with boys who, in this study, generally seemed to find it more difficult than girls to consider in any depth their learning styles and preferences, a point discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

As Scheurich has highlighted, the fact that the interviewer and interviewee do not necessarily attach the same meanings to the language that they use also poses an unavoidable threat to the reliability of the interview (Scheurich, 1997, p. 62). This problem is particularly noticeable in adult-child interviews, perhaps especially when the adult is familiar, through experience and research, with the terminology and perspective of the teacher.

While group interviews with children enjoy certain benefits, noted below, they may also inhibit pupils' contributions. The researcher's observation of peer group pressure exerted in all-boys interview groups runs counter to Simons' experience of the support offered by pupils to reticent members of their interview group. It should, however, be noted that the example cited by her in support of this observation describes an all-girl group (op. cit., p. 40). While this kind of supportive interaction

was sometimes noted in this study, particularly in the girls' groups, the emergence of a hierarchy in boys' groups, entailing the most vociferous boy suppressing, or influencing, the quieter members' contributions, was seen by the researcher as a strong argument for interviewing pupils individually wherever possible. Unfortunately, limited time and the pressure on teachers to ensure that all pupils received the maximum teaching time, meant that this was only possible in a very few cases. The following is an illustration of this kind of male peer group pressure, in which the most dominant, and academically weakest, boy (R) tries to control the input of the brightest boy (S):

AB: "Where is French on your scale of subjects if the best is at the top and the worst is at the bottom?"

R: "...It's nearly at the bottom for me, just that far from the bottom."

S: "It's in the middle, but nearer the top."

R: "No, you don't think that, do you, S?"

3.2.5.5 The use of the interview in this study

The interviews in the study were semi-structured in format and were tape-recorded. All interviews were transcribed and a sample of interview schedules and transcripts is reproduced in the appendix.

Regular informal discussions with all teachers outside lessons, and on the telephone, and 'on the wing' interviews with pupils and teachers during classroom observation, also proved to be highly useful research tools.

3.2.5.5.1 Interviews conducted during Research Phase 1

Between June 1996 and July 1997, during Research Phase 1, three or four boys and girls from each of the single-sex cohorts were interviewed, a total of 64 pupils. These were selected by teachers as a representative cross-sample of ability from each group. The duration of each interview was approximately ten to fifteen minutes. The pupils were interviewed in same-sex groups as this proved to be more desirable for teachers in terms of the time lost from lessons. At that time it was also considered appropriate for two reasons underlined by Lewis: group interviews 'enhance reliability' in terms of reducing the pupils' apprehension (1992, p.416); and they are particularly suitable in studies investigating group behaviours (p. 414). The interview questions addressed issues such as perceived differences between mixed and single-sex groups, attitudes to specific learning tasks and views on the sex of the teacher. The pupils at School D were interviewed twice, once in July 1996, before segregation, and again in February 1997, six months into the initiative, enabling a comparison of their expectations with their experiences to that date.

Each Head of Department (five in all) was interviewed shortly after their initial offer to participate in the project on their motives for establishing single-sex groups, and on their more general views on boys' learning preferences and effective teaching strategies.

In June 1997 all staff from the four schools who had been teaching single-sex groups for at least one year, a total of fifteen, were interviewed in groups; the focus of these interviews was teaching strategies and experiences. One of the aims of these interviews was to supplement, and clarify, data already obtained from the questionnaire which was necessarily limited in scope.

3.2.5.5.2 Interviews conducted during Research Phase 2

Four boys from each of the three higher-ability all-boys groups that were observed in Research Phase 2 were interviewed twice - once in December 1997 after one term of single-sex teaching, and again in July 1998, after one academic year. The second interview was conducted in order to evaluate a possible development in their attitudes to the subject and the group. The pupils were selected by the researcher on the basis of observed behaviours in class, their responses to Pupil Questionnaire 2, and teacher guidance; the sample was intended to represent a range of attitudes and abilities. These interviews were conducted individually in the hope of increasing their reliability. This decision was reached on the basis of an observation made during some of the group pupil interviews the previous year that boys wishing to express an opinion not shared by the rest of the group, were put under pressure by their peers to conform to the general view. It was also felt that reticent boys were intimidated by their more garrulous peers.

The three teachers of these higher-ability all-boys groups were each interviewed individually in June-July 1998. The questions focused principally on observations made by the researcher in class, and were intended to elucidate these and teachers' responses to the staff questionnaire.

3.2.6 The use of observation as a research tool

3.2.6.1 Observation in foreign and second language research

Observation was first used in the field of language teaching by teacher trainers wishing to evaluate classroom performance. Unsurprisingly, given the focus on outcomes and the prevailing trend in empirical research in education in the 1960s, this

took the form of systematic observation. The objectivity implicit in obtaining quantitative data in this way, through the use of a tightly-structured pre-coded schedule such as the Flanders Interaction Analysis System (Flanders, 1970) or one of its many derivatives, became the subject of much debate as traditional positivist methods were challenged by a growing interest in qualitative approaches. Following on from Glaser and Strauss's exposition of 'grounded theory' (1968), the process of data discovery assumed an important place alongside the scientifically orthodox process of data verification in classroom research.

Foreign and second language researchers have responded to this expansion of empirical research methods by re-defining methodological theory:

"The term 'systematic' can now be used to refer to any observation which is subjected to a detailed analysis for the purpose of classifying in some explicit way the events and/or utterances recorded."

(Allwright, 1988, p. 255)

Research practice, however, ostensibly reflects greater conservatism. The focus is still on predominantly quantitative evaluation via one of three dominant research models: the psychometric paradigm; interaction analysis, and discourse analysis. Research that has taken a qualitative interest in the context of language learning has generally fallen short of true ethnographic principles by collecting data from controlled sample groups rather than in genuine classrooms (Chaudron, 1988; Nunan, 1992).

3.2.6.2 The role of the observer

Observation is a central feature of any research which claims to be ethnographic. The role and approach adopted by researchers in the field varies widely, however, and is largely determined by the individual's understanding of objectivity.

‘Objective’ researchers engage in non-participant observation, recording the data in a pre-coded format which demands the least possible interpretation of classroom events. Ethnographers and qualitative researchers undertake ‘participant observation’ with varying levels of participation. Gold’s seminal taxonomy distinguishes between these as complete participant; participant as observer; observer as participant; and complete observer (Gold, 1958, cited in Ball, 1985, p. 26). While this systematic classification suggests that the researcher has ultimate control over the role they play in class, this researcher’s own experience and that of others indicates that the determination of this role is shared both by the observer and the observed. Much has been written on the ‘observer effect’, that is the observer’s influence on the subjects and scene they are observing, but relatively little on the subjects’ influence on the observer. The process of role definition is reciprocal, as Vidich noted in 1955:

“Whether the field-worker is totally, partially or not at all disguised, the respondent forms an image of him and uses that image as a basis of response. Without such an image, the relationship between the field-worker and the respondent by definition does not exist.”

(cited in Delamont & Hamilton, 1993, p. 36)

During this researcher’s short-term observation, pupil-led negotiations to determine her ‘image’ were initiated at an early stage. They commonly assumed the form of an ostensible challenge to her authority, with those boys sitting in close proximity clearly misbehaving. In her second observation of a Year 10 group one boy sitting alone, directly in front, began firing wet paper pellets at his neighbours, unnoticed by the teacher. This activity continued for several minutes despite his victims’ whispered protests. The incident compelled her to make an irrevocable decision which determined her role in the group; in tapping the boy on the shoulder she

not only halted his disruptive behaviour but also cast herself as an authority figure in sympathy with the teacher. This incident forced her to reconsider her earlier naïve preconception of the role as 'participant as observer' as limited to offering academic assistance.

Instances of misbehaviour such as these were not restricted to the early stages of the fieldwork, although fieldnotes from earlier lessons seem, in comparison to those made later, to describe a higher frequency of 'spontaneous' and unprovoked anti-social and ethnocentric behaviours. Such examples of disruptive behaviour cannot, of course, be directly related to the presence of an observer, although they may seem to represent the pupils' request for clarification of the fieldworker's role. Intervention in an incident involving a small group of boys misbehaving, again directly in front of the researcher, was immediately seized upon by them as an opportunity to quiz her on her function in the class.

Intervention such as this may be seen to fail to meet the high standards set by pure ethnography:

"...the classroom researcher must strive to be non-judgemental, that is, neutral with regards to the setting that is being investigated. If this neutrality is absent, the foundations on which ethnography is based, as a viable enterprise, are also absent."

(van Lier, 1990, p. 40)

Some ethnographers succeed in adhering strictly to the principles of participant observation which prescribe a non-disciplinarian stance. Measor, for instance, describes how she chose not to respond to an escalation of pupil deviance observed during a lesson on the Arctic. She maintained a 'neutral expression' while the pupils began to imitate penguins behind the teacher's back and did not react when the 'ace

deviant' began entertaining the class with a silly dance. As the deviance swelled, and the boy began impersonating the teacher, Measor noted how the pupils no longer turned to look at her and interpreted this as a sign of their confidence that she was on their side and would not 'tell' (Measor & Woods, 1991, p. 65-66).

Measor's confidence in this event as a turning point in her research which firmly established her in the pupils' minds as an impartial observer, and consequently reduced the 'observer effect' is, perhaps, exaggerated. The passivity of an adult observer is not necessarily interpreted by a class of naughty pupils as an expression of neutrality. On the contrary I would argue that such an extraordinary response from an adult who, it should be remembered, is associated by pupils with the adult 'team' responsible for regulating class conduct (Davies cited in Ball, 1985, p.50) may be interpreted as an expression of condonation and even encouragement. Measor's own fieldnotes reveal how this personal bias may contribute to the construction of this scene, since she admits that she, like the pupils, was bored by the lesson and relieved when the antics began!

3.2.6.3 The sex of the researcher

Regardless of the depth of participation aimed for by the researcher, the observer's role as constructed by her-/himself and by the pupils is always ambivalent. In her study of deviant girls in a comprehensive Davies (in Ball, 1985, p. 29) found it impossible to be "one of them", since her age, accent and background marked her out as a "cultural stranger". The girls were, however, happy to describe her to others as their "mate" and to take her to the principal sites of deviance, such as the "smokers' corner". This willingness to confide in her, in spite of the insurmountable cultural differences, may also be ascribed to a variable only rarely commented upon in research

literature: the researcher's and respondents' sex. It is much more difficult to 'blend into the woodwork' in one's efforts to reduce the observer effect when one is a young female observing an all-male group. The researcher's efforts to go unnoticed at the back of the room, through the careful selection of long skirts and trousers in unostentatious designs and colours, were regularly thwarted by the lesson content. Whenever the discussion turned to the gender of nouns, or the teacher highlighted a feminine adjectival ending, heads turned to look at her.

3.2.6.4 Access

The researcher's relationship with the teacher also informs the construction of her role in the classroom. Access, that is the fostering of good relations with the 'gatekeeper' i.e. in schools the teacher, is naturally an essential prerequisite in any classroom-based research. The nature of this relationship and its inevitable development may influence the observer's role. In this case, the researcher's relationship with the teachers precluded the possibility of complete participant observation. Their knowledge of her previous experience as a language teacher in secondary school, gained through informal discussion, and in the case of School E where she had completed teaching practice, through direct contact, undoubtedly affected their approach to her in the classroom. The teacher whose department had hosted her on teaching practice some years earlier frequently appealed to her sense of judgment, and sometimes humour, in lessons, while all three teachers used her, to varying degrees, to keep the class under control while they briefly attended to other duties. This kind of treatment clearly casts one in the role of the teacher in the pupils' minds and influences the kind of data collected.

3.2.6.5 The use of observation in this study

While the study is not intended as a pure ethnography, some observation of a number of mixed and single-sex classes was undertaken. Unstructured observation of a number of boys' groups was undertaken on an ad hoc basis during Research Phase 1, between February 1996 and July 1997. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to familiarise herself with some of the groups who would later complete questionnaires, and from whom some would be selected for interview. It also gave an initial insight into the functioning of the individual groups, and their relationships with the teachers.

A more extended period of observation was undertaken during Research Phase 2, between September 1997 and June 1998, of the three higher-ability all-boys groups. Each group was observed for approximately nine hours. The principal function of observation was to examine more closely variables of interest previously identified in interview and questionnaire data. These included the differences in pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil interaction, differences in classroom atmosphere in mixed and single-sex groups, the responses of groups to a range of classroom activities and differences in teaching style. This would seem to be an important part of the research in validating and supplementing the data obtained from questionnaires and interviews; as Baker (1992, p.16) has highlighted, attitudinal data obtained from these sources may not be consistent with behaviour.

Initially the researcher decided to structure the observation around the question, "Does effective language learning and teaching take place in an all-boys group?" The plan was to synthesize accepted pedagogical theories on effective language learning and teaching and then to use these criteria as the framework for a pre-coded schedule. It was anticipated that the data obtained in all-boys groups could be evaluated against

this framework. The focus of structured observation was also to be informed by earlier unstructured observation. This was intended to give a 'scientific' insight into lesson content and interaction analysis was considered as a possible model.

Some weeks into the observation this model appeared inappropriate for the following reasons, formulated at that time:

- it is impossible to define 'effective language learning and teaching' in the absence of a universal standard
- this kind of evaluation implies a focus on quantifiable outcomes; the researcher is more interested in the process of language learning and the quality of interaction
- a pre-coded schedule would preclude the consideration of additional features of lessons which may become more apparent and more important as the year progresses
- a pre-coded schedule would inhibit a holistic interpretation of the learning/teaching picture

Several foci were then identified and compiled as a checklist which is reproduced in the appendix. This process was, in effect, inverting the practice of employing a pre-coded observation instrument, using a post-coded instrument in its place. The objective was both to limit the scope of what was observable through using a checklist and, simultaneously, to provide the flexibility needed to accommodate unforeseen variables.

The foci for observation fell broadly into four areas:

- pupil attitudes to learning MFL
- pupil attitudes to each other
- pupil attitudes to the teacher

- teaching style

The observation checklist reproduced in the appendix shows how each of these foci was sub-divided into observable behaviours. ‘Pupil attitudes to each other’, for instance, were observed through pupils’ verbal and physical interactions with each other, and in terms of their ability to work with others.

Detailed fieldnotes were recorded after each lesson under the checklist headings. It was recognised, however, that the checklist categories were not exhaustive and other data was recorded when it was considered to be of interest. The pupils’ responses to and awareness of the researcher, for instance, was related as this was perceived to have an effect on the learning process.

The data obtained was intended to be used descriptively and interpretively to present an impression of the “classroom climate” (Flanders, 1970) in each of the groups under observation.

3.2.7 Assessment and examination data

Very limited use is made in the study of statistical data indicating pupils’ attainment levels; GCSE grades obtained for the single-sex educated pupils at School A are compared with those of their mixed peers in Chapter 8. It should be stressed that this quantitative data should be seen within the context of the case study, where qualitative data takes precedence. Given the limited duration of the initiatives, and the myriad of variables present in each single-sex group, it was considered that statistical data as a discrete source of evidence of the effectiveness of single-sex teaching would be somewhat unreliable and unrepresentative. Statistical evidence of internal or external assessment was, therefore, regarded as inappropriate and unhelpful in a much broader, qualitative study of classroom dynamics.

3.2.8 The ethics of conducting classroom-based research

The approach of any researcher engaged in classroom-based research is inevitably influenced by an awareness of certain ethical issues. In this study, the researcher was particularly aware of the ethical issues raised both by the practice of scrutinizing pupils' and teachers' behaviour and views, and by being associated with an initiative which could have a significant effect on pupils' learning.

Section 3.2.6.4 noted the importance of fostering good relations with the 'gatekeeper', i.e. the teacher, in order to ensure access in fieldwork. Such good relations, it seems, may only be fostered by exercising a degree of caution as regards data dissemination. Kelly relates the problematics of "giving subjects access to their own data" (Kelly, 1989, p. 110), describing how the researchers on the GIST project grappled with the dilemma of whether their research notes should be fed back to the teacher participants. Similar dilemmas were experienced in the current study, since the teachers involved, like those in the GIST action research project, were keen to find solutions to the problem of pupils' underachievement. Passing on the pupils' explicit criticism of teachers in interviews, and the value-laden comments in the researcher's observation notes, could well have been regarded as constructive by some of the teachers. The potential threat of access being denied, however, if teachers were to respond adversely, was perceived to be such that it was decided that all feedback would be selective and carefully worded.

The researcher was also aware during Research Phase 2 of the ethical issues involved in observing pupils without their consent. While it was felt that assuming an 'invisible' presence at the back of the classroom might be the best way of gathering authentic data, rather than that manufactured for the observer's hearing, the researcher

had some reservations about the power structure that allows adult outsiders into classrooms for research purposes. It was, therefore, decided that the first few lessons would be observed with no introductions, and that the administration of Pupil Questionnaire 2 in October would give the researcher the opportunity to introduce herself and answer pupils' questions.

A further important ethical issue was posed by the researcher's association with a single-sex initiative which had been implemented without the consent of the pupils, and which a number of pupils resented. Figure IX, which was inserted into a pile of questionnaires, expresses the feelings of two girls in Year 9 in School D. The researcher's deliberate avoidance of the word 'experiment' during her contact with schools was intended to dispel pupils' possible feelings of resentment at being steered into an initiative which had no guarantee of success.

As Burgess has highlighted, issues of confidentiality have recently changed to the extent that many subjects now desire the publicity that research may generate (Burgess, March 1998). The schools involved in the research were, indeed, eager to have their names published, and mentioned at conferences and workshops, since they perceived that their involvement in bold initiatives to raise pupil achievement would enhance their public image. The Head of Department in School D even attached a copy of a Times Educational Supplement article describing her school's initiative to her curriculum vitae when she went for a job interview!

The researcher was, nevertheless, careful to make clear to the teachers involved that the data was to be used in a doctoral thesis and always sought their permission before using the schools' names in publications. While an effort has been made to provide anonymity for teachers and schools in the thesis itself, it remains, of course, impossible to guarantee complete anonymity to those who will recognise themselves

FIGURE IX

Pupils' objections to being involved in a single-sex initiative,
found in a pile of questionnaires

"WE FEEL THAT WE
WOULD HAVE PREFERRED
TO BE ASKED IF WE
WANTED TO PARTICIPATE
IN THIS PROJECT!"



GUINNY
↓ PIC.



and their colleagues from detailed descriptions of their practices and views in the text. A copy of the research findings, as described in the concluding chapter, has been forwarded to those teachers who requested it.

3.3 A description of the case study schools

This section outlines some of the main features of each of the schools and modern languages departments involved in the research. Figure X summarises the foreign language provision in each school and Figure XI gives details of the single-sex setting initiative in each. An indication is also given of the relative performance of boys and girls in modern languages in the GCSE examination. Since Ofsted reports do not analyse examination performance by subject and gender, this data was obtained either from Heads of Department who had conducted their own analyses, or from school prospectuses. It is of interest that there is a considerable disparity between boys' and girls' performance in the subject in each school.

Three principal sources were accessed to provide this background data: information regarding the provision of languages supplied by the teachers themselves, especially Heads of department; Ofsted inspection reports; and prospectuses and other documentation produced by the schools, such as 'Information for Parents' booklets and tables of examination results. Occasional reference is made to the researcher's general impression of pupil behaviours and outlooks.

The features described here have been selected on the basis of their perceived importance in contextualising the central issue under investigation - boys' attitudes to learning modern foreign languages in single-sex groups. Chapters 4-7 make further reference to these individual features where they are perceived to be of importance in

FIGURE X FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROVISION IN CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

SCHOOL	FIRST FOREIGN LANGUAGE	SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE	OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES
School A	French	German - restricted to a small number of pupils in higher-ability groups	GCSE results in French surpassed the national average in 1994, and Ofsted noted that boys' achievements were above the national average. There is some pupil interest in trips and exchanges to France and Germany, but a shortage of pupils able to accommodate foreign pupils.
School B	French	German/Spanish alongside French in Year 8	The school offers a thriving programme of exchanges and trips to France, Germany, Spain and Sweden. There is, however, a dearth of dual linguists at KS4, and few pupils study a language at 'A' level. A number of problems relating to FL provision were identified by the staff: restricted resources, such as computers; mixed ability setting; large class sizes, and restricted teaching time; at KS4 languages are allocated only 2 hours per week.
School C	French	German - offered to higher ability pupils only in Years 8 and 9	GCSE results in languages are "generally in line with or above national expectations" (Ofsted report, p. 23). Exchanges and trips are well-supported and, while the school does not have a foreign language assistant, there is a tradition of assistance from Erasmus students based at the nearby university.
School D	French/Spanish/Punjabi	In Year 8, pupils choose one or two of the three languages which are all offered as taster courses in Year 7.	1996 GCSE results in French were well below the national average, according to Ofsted. The school employs a native French speaker on a part-time basis as a support teacher.
School E	French/German	Pupils do not have the opportunity of learning a second foreign language.	In 1993, -4 and -5 GCSE results in modern languages were well below the national average. In 1995 only 13% of girls achieved an A*-C grade, compared with the national average of 53%, and 6% of boys compared with the national average of 40%. In 1996 trips to France and Germany were organised for the first time in several years, and generated considerable interest

FIGURE XI SINGLE-SEX INITIATIVES IN CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

SCHOOL	COHORTS TAUGHT IN SINGLE-SEX GROUPS	ABILITY/ MIXED ABILITY GROUPING	INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH PHASE 1 (June, 1996 - July, 1997) OR RESEARCH PHASE 2 (September, 1997 - July, 1998
School A	Year 10 - 11 2 groups (one all-boys, one all-girls)	Mixed ability	Research phase 1
School B	Year 7 & Year 8 The whole of the Year 7 cohort, with the exception of one mixed group. Around half of these pupils continued learning French in single-sex groups in Year 8, while being taught a second language in mixed groups. The whole of the Year 7 intake of the same year (1996-7) was also taught in single-sex groups.	Mixed ability	Research phase 1
School C	Year 8 - 9 2 groups (one all-boys, one all-girls) for French and German	Higher ability	Research phase 1
School D	Year 10 2 groups (one all-boys, one all-girls)	Higher ability	Research phase 2
School E	Year 9 cohort Year 8 & 9, with the exception of 4 classes	Groups set by ability	Research phase 1 Research phase 2

determining pupils' and teachers' perspectives. Chapter 7 describes in more detail the composition of each department.

3.3.1 School A

School A is a mixed 11-19 school situated in a large town which has two single-sex grammar schools. It is a bilateral school; each year it reserves 30 places for pupils who pass the county's eleven plus exams. In 1998 there were 1430 pupils on roll who, according to the Ofsted Inspection Report, represented both "a wide range of backgrounds and cultures" and "the full range of ability".

The school is academically strong: the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE in 1997 was above the national average (Ofsted Inspection Report, 1997, p. 1). French results were also higher than the national average and boys' achievements in French in 1997 surpassed the national average.

In 1995 girls significantly outperformed boys in French at GCSE level: 62% of girls obtained an A*-C grade compared with only 23% of boys. Unfortunately, no comparable data was available for 1996 or 1997. The 1997 Ofsted report notes that while there were still considerable differences between boys' and girls' achievements in the subject, these had diminished over the previous four years.

A considerable number of pupils convey a first impression of being boisterous and behaviourally challenging. The Ofsted report qualified its observation of most pupils' enjoyment of languages with a comment on this problem:

"Many lack learning skills and drive. Some show insufficient commitment to learning."

(ibid, p. 40)

3.3.2 School B

School B is an 11-16 mixed comprehensive located in a town within the commuter belt of a large city. It became a grant-maintained school in 1994 and is fairly large with around 1,100 pupils. Ofsted's inspection report in 1994 notes that the school's catchment "includes children from families of all socio-economic groups" but adds that the number of pupils eligible for free school meals increased from 8 % in 1991 to 23 % in 1994. This last figure surpasses both the local and national average. The mill-town in which the school is located has suffered in recent years from high rates of unemployment. The Head of Modern Languages commented on poor parental links and the lack of parental support for activities organised by the PTA.

The number of pupils who attained a Grade A*-C at GCSE in 1997 was below the national average. There was a significant disparity between the achievements of boys and girls in modern languages. In French 51 % of girls obtained an A*-C grade, compared with 39% of boys, and in German 85% of girls obtained an A*-C grade, compared with 43% of boys.

Pupils at the school generally appear to be very friendly and forthcoming and, as the Ofsted's 1994 inspection report confirms there seems to be "a good atmosphere" in lessons. cursory observation and the staff's comments also indicate, however, that many pupils have behavioural problems. The inspection highlights this disruptiveness as a particular difficulty in modern languages:

"...at Key Stage 3 the boisterous behaviour of some pupils has an effect upon standards achieved, particularly in listening and speaking."

(Ofsted Inspection Report, December 1994, p. 21)

3.3.3 School C

School C is an 11-16 mixed comprehensive school with around 600 pupils. It is located in a semi-rural area and serves a large rural catchment area which includes a university. In socio-economic terms it is fairly privileged; in 1995 the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals was 9.1 %, half that of the average of the LEA (Ofsted Inspection Report, 1995, p. 5). The school does, however, have a higher proportion of statemented pupils than the LEA average.

Ofsted's 1995 inspection report repeatedly highlights pupils' positive attitudes to learning, and the number of pupils gaining five or more A-C grades at GCSE is significantly above the national average. In 1996 girls' GCSE grades in French were considerably better than boys'; 57% of girls gained an A*-C grade, compared with 34% of boys.

First impressions of the school reveal the pupils, who receive all visitors to the school, to be courteous and mature.

3.3.4 School D

School D is an 11-19 inner-city mixed comprehensive school and community college. In 1995 it had 1087 pupils on roll, of whom 388 came from homes where English was not the first language spoken. The socio-economic profile of the catchment is below the national average and 23% of pupils in 1995 were eligible for free school meals. In 1996 the school gained Technology College status.

The school has pupils representing the full ability range. In 1995 the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C GCSE grades was 31%, 10% lower than the national average. Pupils' performance in modern languages was noticeably weak, and there was also a difference between boys' and girls' GCSE results; 13% of girls gained

an A*-C grade in French in 1995, compared with only 6% of boys. None of the boys in this year achieved a grade higher than a C.

Most pupils create an initial impression of being courteous but a considerable number seem prone to disruptive behaviour. Generally, there seems to be a positive atmosphere within the school and there is a busy programme of extra-curricular and community events involving pupils.

3.3.4 School E

School E is an 11-19 inner city mixed comprehensive school and community college. It had 1,528 pupils on roll in 1996, of whom 46% were of Indian, Pakistani or other ethnic minority origin. Its catchment is characterised by “significant socio-economic deprivation” (Ofsted Inspection Report, 1996, p. 6); around 30% of pupils in 1996 were entitled to free school meals.

Pupils entering the school in 1996 were described as “below average in terms of academic ability” (ibid) and GCSE results for the previous three years were below the national average at grades A*-C (ibid, p. 10). GCSE results from 1997 revealed a striking disparity between boys’ and girls’ performance in French: 41% of girls received an A*-C compared with only 17% of boys.

Pupils create an initial impression of being extremely lively and vociferous and there are frequent instances of disruptive behaviour.

3.4 Conclusions

This chapter set out to contextualise the empirical data and analysis presented in succeeding chapters. It describes how the research methods were selected and tailored to accommodate the problematics of working with a number of real schools in

real time. In presenting reflexive accounts of the way in which the research was conducted, and in describing some of the central features of the case study schools, the researcher has attempted to construct the framework within which the findings presented in the following chapters should be read.

Chapter 4

Teaching and learning styles in modern foreign languages

4. Introduction

This chapter examines boys' preferred learning styles in modern foreign languages. It begins by contextualising and describing the current dominant teaching model, communicative language teaching, and goes on, in the second section, to give an overview of theories on the differential cognitive styles of boys and girls, and teachers' observations on boys' preferred learning styles in modern languages.

The third section analyses pupils' perceptions of specific features of language lessons within the four core skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. It draws on empirical data obtained from the following sources:

- Pupil Questionnaire 1 completed by 288 Year 8 pupils in 1996;
- Pupil Questionnaire 3 administered to 799 pupils in June-July 1997;
- Pupil Questionnaire 4 completed by pupils in six single-sex groups in June 1998;
- pupil interviews;
- classroom observation;
- where appropriate, interviews and discussions with teachers.

A fuller description of the questionnaires is given in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4.1, and copies of the four types employed in the study are included in the appendix.

The final part of the chapter considers those activities which are particularly favoured by boys and the importance of other variables relating to the teaching style and the learning environment.

It should be pointed out that while multiple sources of evidence are triangulated in this chapter in an effort to depict a comprehensive and reliable picture of pupils' views on preferred teaching and learning styles, it is probable that much of the data read (in questionnaires), heard (in interviews) and witnessed (in observation) was generated by factors entirely beyond the researcher's control or knowledge. That such contextual detail must be ignored, or is inaccessible, is an unavoidable hazard of any reasonably wide-ranging study which elects not to focus in depth on individuals' circumstances.

4.1 The development of language teaching methodology: an overview

Since the turn of the century the teaching of modern foreign languages in secondary school has been subject to a series of reforms, both governmental and methodological, which have each in turn dramatically re-defined the dominant pedagogy. The last thirty-five years have been momentous both in locating the subject firmly in the National Curriculum as a subject to be studied by all pupils in all maintained schools, and in the establishment of two professional bodies: CILT (Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research), founded in 1966, and ALL (Association for Language Learning), founded in 1990. These two bodies each provided, for the first time, an official forum - the first governmental and the second independent - for the discussion and dissemination of pedagogical ideas and objectives.

Teaching methodology is ultimately shaped by prevailing social forces, as Rowlinson notes:

“... we are not on a broad uphill road to better and better methodology and more and more efficient teaching, but... methods and materials are necessarily a reflection of aims and purposes which in turn lie in the

changing structure and values of the society around us.”

(Rowlinson, 1994, p. 10)

The recent “democratisation” (Whitehead, 1996, p. 179) of foreign language teaching in schools has necessarily re-defined the delivery of a syllabus originally designed for the academically more able. Traditional teaching methods bequeathed by the teaching of Latin and Greek, with their emphasis on writing, grammar, translation and literature, were nevertheless slow to disappear, even after the comprehensive reform in the 1960s. In 1965 the teaching of modern languages remained an “elitist affair”, with only around 25% of pupils aged eleven and over learning the subject, predominantly in grammar schools (ibid, p. 180). Methodology was heavily influenced by teachers and examination boards who, rather than stressing the practical aims of language learning as a means of communication, regarded the subject as a form of intellectual training.

4.1.1 Audio-lingual and audio-visual teaching methods

The combination of two factors played an important part in the development of language teaching methods in the 1960s: the emergence of new technologies and a behaviourist psychology of learning which saw language learning as a process of habit formation. Teaching was based on learners’ assimilation of language through listening to tape recordings of native speakers which offered little by way of concessions with regard to speed, accent or intonation. The linguistic input was strictly controlled by the teacher and the course, and learners were not encouraged to analyse the language grammatically but were expected to ‘overlearn’ through repetition and drills so that usage of the language became automatic (Rowlinson, 1994, p. 13). This method was

termed 'audio-lingual' and when visuals, usually film-projector stills, were added it was known as 'audio-visual'.

These methods were accommodated by a further technological breakthrough in the late 1960s: the language laboratory. An alternative option was offered by the BBC who produced radio courses of a design similar to those used by the armed forces during the war. These, too, emphasised authentic language use, using recordings of native speakers, but also offered some cultural background information.

Many teachers were keen to adopt such multi-media methods as an alternative to uninspiring traditional textbooks. The attraction of employing electrical equipment to enhance what was essentially parrot-fashion rote learning soon faded, however, as pupils became increasingly demotivated and teachers began to realise the disadvantages of a methodology which relegated opportunities to manipulate and personalise language (Rowlinson, 1994, p. 15). Criticism of these new teaching methods was also bolstered by the publication at that time of Chomsky's linguistic theories, interpreted by many as evidence that language is not acquired by habit formation through passive drills, but through the application of learned rules (Green, 1996, p. 215-217).

4.1.2 Communicative language teaching methods

The subsequent development of the communicative approach, which began in the early 1970s and continues to the present day, has been attributed both to a growth in the market of those learning a language, including adults with vocational requirements, and also changes in general educational philosophies which focused teachers' attention on learning outcomes (Mitchell, 1994, p. 33-34). The communicative approach, which

dominates current methodology, cannot be as narrowly defined as the audio-lingual or -visual methods, as Mitchell elucidates:

“It is not a tightly structured ‘method’ of teaching.... Rather it is a broad assembly of ideas from a range of sources (some linguistic, others more broadly educational), which have come together to be accepted as ‘good practice’ by many contemporary teachers.”

(ibid)

The communicative approach incorporates both the response of teachers to the inadequacy of earlier methods and applied linguists’ theories on what constitutes language proficiency. ‘Communicative competence’, a term coined by Hymes in 1971 to denote not merely grammatical competence, but the ability to use language appropriately in a range of social situations, underpins the methodology (Hymes, 1972). The approach emphasises the practical benefits of language use in a real, as opposed to a laboratory, setting and seeks to teach language through purposeful usage, as Little, Devitt and Singleton clarify:

“By promoting learning not just *for* but *through* communication the communicative approach aligns itself with one of the basic facts of ‘naturalistic’ language acquisition... . . . [it] never loses sight of the fact that all communication takes place in a physical setting and between participants, and has a social purpose.”

(Little, Devitt & Singleton, 1994, p. 43-44)

Communicative language teaching takes a multi-skill approach integrating a wide range of resources including overhead projectors, ICT, tape recorders, video recorders, flashcards and readers. The key features may be summarised as:

- Purposeful tasks, commonly requiring pupils to fill a genuine information gap

- The extensive use of the target language for classroom communication
- Employment of authentic materials intended for use by native speakers in the 'real world'
- Frequent use of role-play and simulation, to emulate real-life contexts
- Active learning, typically involving pair- and group-work
- Greater tolerance of errors, and priority given to meaning rather than accuracy

While this approach is generally employed with relish by teachers wishing to make their lessons enjoyable and relevant, it is not without drawbacks. Informal discussions with teachers in the course of this study, and during the researcher's previous teaching career, have suggested that some teachers perceive that formal grammar teaching sits uneasily in the innovative framework of the communicative approach, which, they mistakenly believe, places central emphasis on the use and practice of spoken language. Difficulty is experienced in reconciling the demands of communicative teaching methods with those of the exam boards, whose syllabuses still tend to reward accuracy in writing and proficiency in the application of grammar. Furthermore, personal experience has suggested that while the active involvement of pupils may undoubtedly prove to be highly motivating, it is hugely demanding on teachers' classroom management skills and creativity.

Mitchell (1994) includes a further feature in her description of communicative teaching methods which is not included in the list above: the teacher encourages pupils to reflect on and discuss learning strategies. This item has been deliberately omitted as a key feature of communicative methods here, on the grounds that it was so rarely observed in language classrooms. The issue of how closely teaching styles observed in

this study seemed to exemplify communicative methods, and the effect this may have had on pupils' performance, is discussed further in the concluding chapter.

4.1.3 Foreign language teaching syllabuses and the National Curriculum

Communicative methods were championed in the 1970s and the early 1980s by localised groups of teachers who were dissatisfied with the requirements of national examinations, which provided the only statement of language teaching aims at that time. They recognised that many pupils were demotivated by classroom tasks which, in line with those in the examinations, were perceived as meaningless and irrelevant (Page & Hewett, 1987). An innovative syllabus, known as Graded Objectives in Modern Languages (GOML), was designed by these teachers with the support of researchers.

While the first syllabuses and tests were produced by only two groups in Oxfordshire and York, 81 such groups were in existence by 1987 (ibid). The syllabus provided poorly motivated pupils, often those of a lower ability entered for the CSE examination, with short-term goals to achieve every six weeks, every week or even every lesson. It listed relevant topic areas and divided skills into receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive (speaking and writing). Pupils were awarded certificates, some of which were endorsed by universities such as Cambridge and York. The syllabus, with its emphasis on realistic, relevant tasks, proved to be a highly significant influence on both the GCSE syllabus, and the National Curriculum for modern languages, drawn up some years later.

Foreign languages syllabuses in the 1980s were heavily influenced by the 'functional/notional' paradigm. Traditional grammar-based syllabuses were replaced with a model that adopted a functional view of language from applied linguists such as

Wilkins (1976); language was categorised according to its function, such as 'apologising' and 'thanking'. While such situational syllabuses succeeded in ousting the traditional bias on grammar they, like the audio-lingual and visual methods, were also criticised for encouraging rote learning and stifling linguistic creativity (Mitchell, 1994, p. 36).

The replacement of 'O' level by GCSE examinations in 1988 represented a notable turning point in the teaching of modern languages, as noted by Whitehead:

"...the GCSE in modern languages has been arguably the most important development in MFL teaching and learning in the past thirty years: the embodiment for the first time of practical objectives for all abilities and backgrounds in the GCSE made the new approach 'official' for all teachers of modern languages..."

(Whitehead, 1996, p. 203)

The new examination recognised the redundancy of an antiquated means of assessment comprising purely academic tasks such as prose translations, compositions, comprehensions and dictations, the main purpose of which had been to identify those pupils worthy of advanced foreign language study, and hence eligible for a university education. The GCSE accommodated a much wider range of ability, conflating two separate exams, CSE and 'O' level, in one exam incorporating basic, now known as foundation, and higher level tiers. While the syllabus did not prescribe any specific teaching methodology, its equal weighting of the four skills - speaking, listening, reading and writing - and its focus on authenticity and real-life situations implicitly advocated communicative methods.

Clearer guidance was given to teachers following the 1988 Education Reform Act which established the National Curriculum, prescribing core and foundation

subjects to be taught in all maintained schools in the UK. Modern foreign languages was included as a foundation subject to be taught to all pupils at Key Stage 3 from 1992 and attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements were stipulated. Non-statutory guidance on teaching ideas was also made available.

New orders issued in 1995 stipulated that all pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 should be learning a language on either a full or short course by 1996. The orders did not prescribe methodology; examples of how teachers could enable their pupils to reach attainment levels in each of the four attainment targets and non-statutory guidance were omitted, though they are still available under separate cover.

Exam syllabuses have undergone a number of revisions since this date, the most far-reaching of which was the introduction of target language testing in 1998; all rubrics are now in the target language, while only 10% of pupils' responses, compared with 50% in the previous exam, are in English. This major revision has spawned a number of other modifications, notably the introduction of pupil access to dictionaries in most parts of the exam, a greater reliance on visuals for rubrics, and some multiple-choice questions. While the reform was initially greeted with alarm by many teachers who anticipated particular difficulties for lower ability pupils, it was welcomed by proponents of communicative methods who had long since perceived the incongruity of examining through the medium of English a subject taught principally through the target language.

4.2 Boys' preferred learning styles

Recent years have seen a resurgence of research interest in the field of cognitive styles, with a particular interest being shown in gender differences. Some of this research cites scientific evidence that there is a causal link with differences in the

structure and functioning of the brain and the production of hormones. For the reasons cited at the beginning of Chapter 1, discussion of these arguments lies outside the remit of this study. Furthermore, it is important that a distinction is drawn between the constructs of ability and learning style. Ability describes the individual's potential for success within a particular field, and it is of necessity restricted. Learning styles "describe the ways individuals prefer to work" (Head, 1996, p. 61). They are not strictly prescribed; individuals may select from a range of styles depending on the circumstances. Current texts on male and female learning styles stress that while patterns common to males and females respectively have been observed, the number of similarities found between the sexes may be equal to, or greater than, the number of differences (see, for instance, Murphy & Gipps, 1996). While any study of boys' and girls' learning styles needs to bear this caveat in mind, common trends amongst adolescent males may be made more evident by peer pressure which forces boys to conform to accepted norms of behaviour.

Research frequently juxtaposes boys' strengths in speaking with their weaknesses in reading and writing. A report produced by the QCA (1998) on boys' performance in English notes that boys are often articulate and confident speakers but do not generally write at length and pay little attention to the accuracy or presentation of their writing. Speaking is, however, not always taken seriously by boys who do not regard it as 'real' work; "real work" often involves writing and is "product-orientated" (Askew & Ross, 1988, p. 40). Activities which are perceived as abstract and lacking in a tangible outcome are often dismissed as unimportant by boys who "respond well to clearly set tasks with well-defined outcomes" (QCA, 1998, p. 10).

Boys are, as outlined in Chapter 1, often less inclined than girls to use language for personal interaction with each other. They are often poor at collaborating and their

competitiveness is sometimes seen in discourse which is characterised by interrupting each other and jostling over turn-taking. Girls, in contrast, are frequently good negotiators and display greater sensitivity in listening to each other (see, for instance, Askew & Ross, 1988). A study of pupils working in groups on solving mathematical problems found that girls worked better in a 'forced mode of interaction' in which each girl was forced to contribute something to the discussion, and boys in a 'free mode of interaction' where there were no restrictions on who should contribute, when or how often (Goldman, 1997, p. 236).

Boys' affinity for multiple choice exercises and girls' superior skills in essay writing have been attributed to their respective tendencies to "extract" and "embed" (Head, 1996, p. 62). While girls generally take a holistic approach and display greater empathy with other people and their surroundings, boys demonstrate greater spatial skills and take an analytical, rule-based approach to extract information from a narrower context (Gipps, June 1997). This may lead to boys taking more risks, illustrated by them contributing more readily to oral discussions and making more mistakes in written work.

An active approach to learning is preferred by many boys who find it difficult to concentrate for extensive periods of time. They do not, it has been claimed, respond well to "transmission-style teaching", such as copying from the board, but enjoy practical and varied work, and working in groups (Bradford, 1995).

Boys and girls sometimes display differing responses to their failure, as Head notes:

"Males tend to develop a defence mechanism of attributing success to their own efforts and failure to external factors. Girls show the reverse tendency. Consequently boys will blame a fault in the apparatus, or in the

teacher's explanation, if they experience failure in a practical class. Girls may blame themselves even if the problem lies with faulty apparatus."

(Head, 1996, p. 63)

Such differences between boys' and girls' learning styles should, however, always be regarded with caution. As outlined in the Introduction, boys, and girls, should not be seen as homogenous groups, and it should be remembered that any gender-focused study will tend to highlight differences, rather than similarities. Any endeavour to identify common traits amongst a cohort, in this case underachieving boys in foreign languages, should be mindful of this, and the concomitant problematics of such a study.

4.2.1 Boys' preferred learning styles in modern foreign languages

Consideration of these generic male learning patterns and the issues discussed in Chapter 1 may raise serious reservations about the intrinsic appeal of modern languages to boys, particularly if the teaching is modelled on a more traditional approach. The following list summarises traits perceived as common to boys who underachieve in languages. They were identified by teachers involved in workshops led by the researcher during the period of the research. They are not ranked according to their perceived importance.

- disorganised
- attention-seeking
- tendency to produce limited language
- mobile
- need variety, otherwise limited concentration

- show little responsibility for their own learning, blame others
- enjoy hi-tech work
- enjoy games
- poor at forward planning, looking at anything long-term
- enjoy creative, imaginative work
- curious about cultural background information
- appreciate a clear structure to work, clear sense of direction and progress
- appreciate rewards, reassurance, encouragement
- appreciate immediate feedback about performance and progress
- need to know that the subject has some vocational value
- enjoy competition

While many of these characteristics may be common to male adolescents regardless of which subject they are learning, they may be thrown into relief by a subject which in many respects does not conform to the adolescent male's expectations of work and which may be invested with a feminine image, ideas which are examined in greater detail in Chapter 5. The extent to which these ideas may also affect teachers' expectations and behaviours is investigated in Chapter 6.

4.3 Pupil responses to specific learning activities in modern foreign languages

4.3.1 Speaking

4.3.1.1 Pupils' attitudes to speaking modern languages

There is considerable research evidence to suggest that speaking is perceived by many boys as enjoyable, and in some cases as the most or only enjoyable aspect of the foreign language lesson. Almost a third of the boys in the 1983 sample for the HMI

study Boys and modern languages mentioned oral work as their favourite activity and similar findings were described by Batters (1988) and Aplin (1991). The results of Pupil Questionnaire 1, administered to 288 Year 8 pupils in 1996, seem to corroborate this theory; “speaking” gained more of the boys’ ‘enjoy a lot’ and ‘enjoy’ votes than any of the other three core skills.

It should not be assumed, however, that boys’ enjoyment of speaking is automatic and unconditional. Powell and Littlewood’s survey of Year 9 pupils in 1983 found that both sexes were equally unenthusiastic about spoken French, while Clark and Trafford’s more recent study concluded that there was no consensus amongst pupils about which of the four skills they found most enjoyable or most difficult (1996, p. 43). Analysis of Pupil Questionnaire 3, administered to 799 pupils in 1997, similarly revealed only minor differences in the perceptions of boys and girls. Responses to the statement “I enjoy speaking in French/German” are summarised in Figure XII and show that it is the girls who rate speaking marginally more favourably. This seems to lend support to Sunderland’s finding, previously mentioned in Chapter 1, that foreign languages may represent something of an anomaly where girls’ and boys’ verbal participation is concerned (Sunderland, 1998).

Analysis of boys’ responses to this question by year group suggests a possible correlation with age: 41.3% of boys in Year 7 responded positively; 28.2% in Year 8; 30.5% in Year 9; and 18.6% in Year 11. While it was not possible to monitor the changing attitudes of one cohort of boys in a longitudinal study, such figures suggest a gradual decline in boys’ motivation in speaking as they grow older. To some extent this was observed in classes in pupils’ interactions with the teacher in the foreign language; while the Year 8 boys generally responded promptly to the teachers’ questions in French the Year 9 boys appeared to become increasingly reluctant to volunteer answers

FIGURE XII

“I enjoy speaking in French/German”
A comparison by sex of pupil

	n	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	NO RESPONSE
BOYS	382	28.5%	37.9%	33.6%	0%
GIRLS	417	29.4%	45.9%	24.7%	0%
BOYS + GIRLS	799	29%	41.9%	29.1%	0%

to the teacher's questions in front of the rest of the group. In the Year 10 boys' group, and in the Year 11 boys' class observed on one occasion, hands were rarely raised and the teachers were forced to elicit answers by selecting respondents. It should be recognised, however, that these differences could also be attributed to other variables such as the teaching style and the relationship between the class and the teacher, variables explored further later in this section and in Chapter 6.

Older boys' reluctance to speak publicly in a foreign language may be attributed to peer pressures operating on male adolescents which cause them to interpret demonstrations of co-operation with the teacher, or academic diligence, as a threat to their image and possession of power in the group (see Section 1.3.1). On a number of occasions boys who seemed to possess considerable power in their respective groups in Years 9 and 10 by virtue of their non-co-operative, trend-setting male images, were observed loudly declaring their ignorance in response to the teacher's questions, when other evidence suggested that this was not the case.

Speaking was identified as a popular activity by both boys and girls in interviews, although more girls than boys expressed their dislike. The unanimous negative view of speaking held by the Year 7 girls in School B in December 1996 was consistent with their reticence in the interview and many boys proved to be more forthcoming verbally in interviews than their female counterparts. The majority of boys and girls seemed to appreciate the comparatively greater practical value of learning how to speak a language rather than how to write it. Of the 799 pupils who completed Pupil Questionnaire 3 in 1997, 60.8% of boys and 58.8% of girls agreed with the suggestion that, "It is better to learn how to speak French/German rather than how to write it."

In interviews a number of boys explained their choice of speaking as the most enjoyable activity by referring to the difficulties they experienced in writing, particularly with spelling:

(Year 10, School A): “[I enjoy speaking]. I’m not so keen on the writing because I’m not very good at spelling it, but I can speak it better than I can write it...”

(Year 10, School E): “If you’re speaking you can say what you think and it might come out better than if you write it on paper.”

4.3.1.2. Unsolicited use of the target language

Unsolicited production of the target language by a number of boys was sometimes observed in lessons during Research Phase 2. In Year 10 (School E) this took the form of some pupils’ quiet repetition of words spoken by the teacher, a seemingly spontaneous response which may have served as a learning strategy. In Year 9 (School D) a group of boys who were often disruptive regularly expanded on answers with some extremely accurate and well-pronounced phrases. Since such phrases often bore little relation to the questions asked, their production was partially interpreted by the researcher as the boys’ efforts to bolster their unco-operative, and non-academic, image and amuse the class. One such incident ran as follows:

Ms. C: “Qui a son anniversaire en mai?”

L: “Je ne sais pas.”

J: “Je ne comprends pas.”

T (shortly afterwards, under his breath): “Zoot alors....Bof.”

Ms. C: “T?”

T: “Pardonnez-moi”

L (in the background): “Il y a du...” (produces several nonsensical French-sounding words)

Such interaction must be seen in the context of a class which did very little speaking; all four boys interviewed from this group claimed that if they had a say in how the lesson was taught they would do more speaking. Against this background such voluntary, if inappropriate, spoken contributions may well be seen as a covert request to speak the language more often.

4.3.1.3 Responses to specific speaking tasks

Pupil Questionnaire 1 revealed “acting out a short dialogue” to be a popular speaking activity with boys; 21% of boys out of the sample of 288 Year 8 pupils, voted ‘enjoy a lot’, and 30% ‘enjoy’. The girls’ response was only marginally less enthusiastic - 2% less in each response category. Enjoyment of this activity may be attributed to boys’ general liking of drama; numerous boys in interviews cited drama as their favourite school subject, in contrast with only a handful of more assertive girls. A number of teachers attributed this preference to boys feeling more confident in a definite imaginary role as opposed to the uncertain role imposed on them in class. Figure XIII shows boys’ and girls’ responses to a statement about role-play, included in Pupil Questionnaire 3; it is quite popular with both sexes, although the boys are rather more positive.

“Moving around the class, interviewing others” proved to be a popular activity with boys and girls in Year 8 who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 1 in 1996; 28% of boys and 31% of girls voted ‘enjoy a lot’ and 26% of boys and 33% of girls voted ‘enjoy’. While mobility is often cited as an important variable in enhancing boys’

FIGURE XIII

“I enjoy doing role-plays in the lessons”
A comparison by sex of pupil

	n	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	NO RESPONSE
BOYS	382	38.4%	31.7%	27.7%	2.2%
GIRLS	417	32.7%	30.8%	33.4%	3.1%
BOYS + GIRLS	799	35.5%	31.2%	30.5%	2.8%

learning, this result suggests that girls may also respond positively to an active learning style. It is interesting that the same item on Pupil Questionnaire 4, distributed to single-sex groups in June 1998, attracted similarly large numbers of positive responses - 46.7% of the boys and 37.5% of the girls voted 'enjoy' - although the number of boys disliking the task - 20% - outnumbered the girls' 15.3%. One explanation of this surprising negativity is, perhaps, to be found in an interview conducted with four boys from the Year 8 all-boys group:

AB: "How about this one, 'moving around the classroom...' "

G: "We ain't done that."

AB: "But if you were to do it?"

G: "Chaos."

M: "It would be funny, 'cos we'd all be messing about."

S: "Everybody would be running around."

The self-awareness demonstrated by these higher-ability boys, in recognising that the group's lack of self-discipline might prevent them from participating in such an activity sensibly, was not always found in all-boys groups. Both the views of these boys, and the figures above, exemplify the way in which boys' preferences may deviate from stereotypical expectations, in this case with regard to mobility.

4.3.2. Listening

4.3.2.1 Pupils' attitudes to listening

The difficulty of listening to a foreign language, particularly on audio cassette, is often commented upon by pupils of both sexes. Chambers' survey of 191 Year 9 pupils revealed that listening was the least popular of the four skills (Chambers, 1993, p. 14). If, as was noted in Chapter 1, boys' aural skills are inferior to girls' (Shaw,

1995, p. 77), they might be expected to struggle with the passive nature of many listening tasks in a subject that makes particular demands on their ability to listen. “Listening” on Pupil Questionnaire 1, distributed to Year 8 in 1996, gained the lowest number of ‘enjoy a lot’ votes from the boys when compared with the other three core skills. A typically passive task, “listening to a foreign language assistant talking about school or Christmas in their home country” ranked amongst those activities least enjoyed by the boys; this contrasted with their much more enthusiastic response to the prospect of the more active task, “asking a foreign language assistant questions”.

When listening is singled out by pupils as being unenjoyable the usual reason cited is its difficulty. In response to an item on Pupil Questionnaire 3, “I find it difficult to understand spoken French/German from the tape recorder”, 38.7% of boys and 35.1% of girls voted ‘Yes’. There is, it appears, a broadly similar perception of difficulty amongst boys and girls, with a considerable number experiencing problems. Pupil Questionnaire 4, administered to single-sex groups in Schools D and E in 1998, revealed that listening is not, however, wholly disliked; these boys claimed to enjoy it more than reading and writing, though less than speaking, with 25% claiming to enjoy it. Listening was only occasionally singled out in interviews with boys as the least enjoyable feature of language lessons, with reading and writing generally ranked lower.

Pupils in interviews frequently identified the speed of listening texts as the main problem and recognised that it was much easier to understand the familiar voice of the teacher who made concessions with regard to pace. Boys and girls often commented that individual control over the speed at which the tape was played would facilitate listening and boost their confidence.

4.3.2.2. Responses to specific listening tasks

The four listening tasks included in Pupil Questionnaire 4, distributed to single-sex groups during Research Phase 2, attracted a highly positive response from the boys, who claimed to enjoy them much more than the girls. These tasks were originally included in Pupil Questionnaire 1, distributed to Year 8 in 1996; the results also revealed a considerable difference in their appeal to boys and girls. Analysis of Pupil Questionnaire 4 showed boys' and girls' enjoyment of these tasks in single-sex groups in 1998 to be as follows:

	<u>Boys</u> (n=60)	<u>Girls</u> (n=72)
<i>following directions from a tape to</i>	28.3%	12.5%
<i>find a building on a map</i>		
<i>listening to a tape and filling in a grid</i>	30%	15.3%
<i>listening to a description of someone</i>	48.3%	25%
<i>wanted by the police and drawing that</i>		
<i>person</i>		
<i>watching videos</i>	71.7%	58.3%

Tasks such as these would seem to appeal to boys since they involve either practical application of the information gained through listening, such as filling in a grid, creativity or the use of visuals. When activities are perceived by boys as games they are also seen as enjoyable.

Classroom observation of a lower ability boys' group during Research Phase 1 provided a good example of the way in which boys are demotivated by listening tasks which have no clear purpose, and involve listening for its own sake, and motivated by those which involve them filling in an information gap. The class quickly became

restless when asked by the teacher to listen to one of the boys describing himself but became quiet and attentive when the task was modified so that they had to guess who in the class was being described.

4.3.3 Reading

4.3.3.1 Pupils' attitudes to reading

There would seem to be a significant disparity in boys' and girls' attitudes to reading in a foreign language. Pupil Questionnaire 1, administered in 1996, revealed it to be much more popular with girls, and the 60 boys in single-sex groups who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 4 ranked it as the least enjoyable of the four core skills. Only 8.3% of them claimed to enjoy reading, compared with 19.4% of the 72 girls.

Several reasons have been cited by academics to explain boys' lack of interest and inferior aptitude in reading across the curriculum: the feminine, passive image of reading; the unappealing content of reading material; and the necessary alienation of the reader from others, an isolation which boys, who crave the security of company, resent (Shaw, 1995). In interviews, however, the large number of boys across the age range who identified reading in a foreign language as unenjoyable generally gave the following reason for their dislike:

Boy (Year 9, School D): "...the books don't know what level you're at, and there are words I've never seen before, and it confuses me."

Boy (Year 7, School B): "I don't really like reading because I don't understand what they're saying. Miss has to tell you."

The 'they' mentioned in this second quotation refers to cartoon strip characters in a textbook; this statement would seem to suggest that the frustration engendered by

non-comprehension overrides the potential appeal of comic-style texts usually enjoyed by boys. It can also be inferred from the pupils' dependence on the teacher, often referred to in interviews, that pupils lack the knowledge or incentive to access unknown vocabulary in dictionaries or glossaries. While this may be due to teachers' inadequate training of pupils' dictionary skills - a skill only recently required by the new exam syllabuses - there would also seem to be problems associated with the provision of dictionaries. None of the schools in the study were able to provide all pupils with a dictionary and not all pupils possessed their own copy. Pupils were not regularly observed using dictionaries and one pupil made the comment that even when pupils owned dictionaries they did not always bring them along to lessons.

The Year 9 girls in School C associated their unusual dislike of reading with anxiety:

(Year 9, School C): "If you don't understand you don't feel like asking the teacher in front of other people who can, who know the word."

Such anxiety is more commonly a major reason for girls' liking of reading. A Year 10 girl in School A, for instance, clarified her preference for reading and writing by adding that she was not confident enough to appreciate speaking French. More reserved boys were also more likely to express a more positive attitude to reading in preference to activities which demanded public participation.

4.3.3.2. Responses to specific reading tasks

Pupil Questionnaire 1 suggested that reading activities were generally more popular with boys if they involved physical activity, visuals, or IT. The responses of the pupils in the single-sex groups to Pupil Questionnaire 4 broadly confirmed these findings, as the following percentages show:

	<u>Boys</u> (n=60)		<u>Girls</u> (n=72)	
	<u>enjoy</u>	<u>dislike</u>	<u>enjoy</u>	<u>dislike</u>
<i>reading cartoons/comics</i>	66.7%	5%	38.9%	6.9%
<i>moving around the classroom, matching up signs on the walls with English signs on a list</i>	46.7%	8.3%	38.9%	18.1%
<i>reading about the different way of life in France</i>	21.7%	25%	29.2%	19.4%

The boys' enthusiasm for comics clearly contrasts with the girls' less positive response, and while the prospect of moving and reading text in a different medium appeals to large numbers of both sexes, dislike is registered by a greater number of girls. Both sexes demonstrate negative attitudes to reading for cultural background information, a task which has no practical outcome.

4.3.4 Writing

4.3.4.1 Pupils' attitudes to writing

Boys' generally negative attitudes to writing, and the difficulty they experience in writing, is now well documented. The HMI study of boys and languages (1985, p. 10) found that written work was one of the least popular activities with boys learning modern foreign languages while Aplin more recently concluded that both sexes disliked writing more than anything else (1991, p. 7). Boys who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 1 in 1996 claimed to dislike writing more than the other three core skills, and analysis of the Pupil Questionnaire 3 results in 1997 revealed a considerable disparity between boys' and girls' attitudes: 50.5% of boys registered a negative view,

compared with 37.8% of girls, while 25.3% claimed to enjoy writing, compared with 34.4% of girls. Boys' written responses to the sentence completion tasks in questionnaires often seemed to exemplify this point, since many were far less detailed than the girls'.

Most boys cited the difficulty they experience with spelling as their main reason for disliking writing. Writing was also sometimes criticised on the grounds that it was less useful than speaking and served no practical purpose. This point was more often made by boys, but also sometimes by girls:

Girl (Year 9, School D): "If you go to France you're not going to write everything down, are you? It's not really important, writing."

Boy (Year 10, School E): "[I enjoy it] when we do practical stuff like plays and someone has to read out their things and that. I don't like it when we're just, like, writing things out."

A handful of boys and girls also made the point that writing was difficult because they were unable to manipulate the language. One girl, observed in class, left the writing section on a test paper blank because, she said, she was unable to write sentences, and one boy commented:

(Year 8, School D): "I don't like the writing because you don't know how to put things together, 'cos there's little things like 'is' that we'd say and you don't know the things like that."

Such views may be interpreted as a comment on teaching style, although it should be made clear that these two pupils were of lower ability. It is highly likely that the Year 10 boy's idea of 'writing things out' is to copy words and sentences into his book since the overwhelming majority of writing tasks observed in class took this form. When pupils were observed producing their own written French they experienced

considerable difficulty in becoming independent users of the language and often resorted to extracting phrases and sentences from textbooks. When, on one occasion, the researcher asked a boy in Year 9 what the carefully-coloured French phrase on his poster meant he was unable to answer and merely pointed it out in the textbook.

4.3.4.2. Responses to specific writing tasks

The results of Pupil Questionnaire 1 in 1996 suggested that while there was a significant difference in boys' and girls' attitudes to the core skill - 23% of boys claimed to dislike writing, compared with 4% of girls - specific activities showed less obvious differences. Formal, reading comprehension-style tasks were disliked by both boys and girls although the boys' attitude was rather more negative; 28% of boys claimed to dislike the prospect of "writing answers to questions about a letter", compared with 15% of girls, and 21% disliked "writing answers to questions about an advert", compared with 14% of girls. Letter-writing tasks appealed much more to girls, however; 43% of girls claimed that they would 'enjoy a lot' writing a letter which their teacher was going to send to France, Germany or Spain, compared with 23% of the boys.

These results suggest that when writing is given a practical outcome, in the form of a recipient who may respond, its appeal to boys is not automatically increased. Combining writing with visuals, in posters or cartoons, or writing a piece of drama which will be performed, seem to be more effective means of boosting both boys' and girls' motivation, as the following results from Pupil Questionnaire 4 in 1998 show:

	<u>Boys</u>		<u>Girls</u>	
	(n=60)		(n=72)	
	<u>enjoy</u>	<u>dislike</u>	<u>enjoy</u>	<u>dislike</u>
<i>designing your own cartoon</i>	65%	8.3%	47.2%	9.7%
<i>in French</i>				
<i>writing a role play with a partner</i>	35%	18.3%	34.7%	8.3%

The results of Pupil Questionnaire 3 suggest that writing a letter can be made much more appealing to boys if it is word processed: while only 11.7% of boys claimed that they would enjoy “writing a letter to a hotel in France”, 56.7% claimed that they would enjoy “using the computer to write a letter”. IT is, it would seem, an important motivating factor. It should, however, also be pointed out that its appeal may equally extend to girls; 51% of girls responded with ‘enjoy a lot’ to the prospect of “using the computer to write a postcard” in Pupil Questionnaire 1. This compared with 36% of the boys, although it should be remembered that the girls were much more enthusiastic about writing in general.

4.3.5 Activities most enjoyed by pupils in language lessons

Boys most often selected the following features as the most enjoyable aspect of learning a language: games; IT; activities which are regarded as practical or active, such as moving around the classroom to conduct a survey and making videos; and role-plays. Lower ability pupils in particular often regarded games as the only redeeming feature of the subject:

AB: “Where is French on a scale of subjects if your favourite is at the top and your worst at the bottom?”

Lower ability boy (Year 7, School B): “It’s nearly at the bottom for me, just far from the bottom. That little bit at the bottom is just for the games.”

Boys were particularly motivated by games and resented their disappearance from lessons; one boy nearing the end of Year 8 related how the teacher no longer played games with the class, a tendency also observed by HMI in older classes (1985). Boys of all abilities generally equated progress with fun:

High ability boy (Year 9, School D): “I feel I haven’t learned nothing this year. I learned a lot more last year. It was more fun last year.”

Using IT was usually regarded as highly enjoyable; many of the boys in Year 10 in School E selected a module based on a French software package as the most enjoyable activity and 90% of the boys who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 3 in 1997 claimed to enjoy playing computer games in the target language.

While girls also often picked out games as particularly enjoyable they were more likely than the boys to select passive activities which did not draw attention to themselves such as reading, writing postcards, doing projects and producing wall displays. More self-confident girls, however, tended to select activities similar to those chosen by the boys.

4.4 The importance of other variables relating to teaching and learning styles

4.4.1 Pair- and group-work

Both boys and girls seemed to favour working in pairs or groups rather than on their own. 60% of boys and 63% of girls who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 3 claimed that they worked well in pairs or small groups and of the boys’ groups who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 4, 58.3% claimed to enjoy working with a partner

and 61.7% with a group. Only 6.7% of the boys reported enjoying working on their own.

In interviews, however, girls appeared more confident that they were able to work effectively in groups, pointing out that they preferred to be quietly corrected by a partner than by the teacher in front of the class. In contrast, boys sometimes demonstrated an awareness of not working well in groups, as Year 8 boys in School D admitted:

AB: "Do you prefer speaking to the teacher or speaking in pairs or groups?"

M: "Speaking to the teacher."

S: "Yeh, 'cos if we're in groups everyone tends to just cheat and..."

(Some laughter, general agreement)

D: "The teacher knows what you're saying and people in your class only know as much French as you do, so they just..."

S: "They can't really correct you."

While boys often seem to be heavily dependent on the teacher they also value being allowed to work independently. It is of interest that boys in interviews frequently chose as their favourites those school subjects which are less tightly-structured by the teacher and may allow pupils to work at their own pace and enjoy some freedom of movement, such as art, technology, music, drama and PE. The higher-ability Year 9 boys were observed to be working most conscientiously and sensibly on tasks which were not strictly teacher-directed such as writing and producing display work. One Year 7 boy qualified his claim to have enjoyed working in the computer room by adding:

(School B): "But it would help if she didn't walk around saying 'You've done that wrong!' It'd be better if she'd just sit down and let us get on

with it.”

4.4.2 Textbooks

The boys in the study did not respond positively to using textbooks extensively. 45% of male respondents to Pupil Questionnaire 3, and 38.3% of those who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 4 claimed to dislike using textbooks. When boys were observed using textbooks in class they generally worked well when the exercise was only one of a series of activities in that lesson and had to be completed to a deadline, and considerably less well when the exercise lasted all lesson.

4.4.3 Homework and tests

Homework and tests were both rated highly by the boys in single-sex groups who were asked about their importance in Pupil Questionnaire 4. 90% of boys agreed that “doing homework on time” was important and 46.7% that “getting homework regularly” was important. The teachers of all-boys groups did not report seeing a significant improvement in boys’ attitudes to homework on the whole, however. The boys in Years 8 and 10 were observed discussing homework more regularly than the Year 9 boys. The Year 8 boys especially seemed to enjoy competing with each other to get the best Ms for homework and when objections were voiced to the teacher when he set homework they were clearly intended for comic effect. Much of the homework that was set by the teachers of the boys in Year 8 and 9 did not appear to be particularly challenging and was not presented as an integral part of the lesson, but often as an unplanned afterthought.

55% of the boys in the three single-sex groups agreed that “having regular tests” was important. This point was often borne out in interviews with boys’ reluctant admission of their necessity:

(Year 8, School D): “I don’t like them but they make you remember.”

(Year 9, School D): “Having regular tests [is important]. I don’t like them but it would make you learn better.”

The Year 8 boys were frequently observed doing vocabulary tests in class, even doing one in an extra class taught during the holidays, to which they responded extremely positively. The teacher placed great emphasis on their performance in these tests, and the accuracy with which words were written, and they developed into lively competitions between the boys, with merits being awarded for the best Ms. Some class time was given over to discussing boys’ performance in these tests and guidance given on how to prepare for them.

4.4.4. Competing

Observation suggested that the younger the boys, the keener they were to compete with each other. Analysis of the responses to Pupil Questionnaire 4 seemed to confirm this correlation and also suggested a considerable difference between boys in Year 9 and 10. In Year 8 42.9% of boys who responded thought that competition was important, compared with 38.9% in Year 9 and only 14.3% in Year 10. While competition was not generally seen as particularly aggressive, the boys in Year 9 made disparaging comments about each other much more often than in any other group. These differences may also be attributed to the teaching style; the Year 8 teacher actively encouraged competition between the boys while the Year 10 teacher did not.

The Year 9 boys' less congenial competition with each other seemed to be generated independently of the teacher.

A considerable number of the teachers of all-boys groups described capitalizing on the boys' interest in the progress of the parallel all-girls groups; competitions in singing, grammar and vocabulary knowledge were organised and perceived by teachers to be highly motivating, particularly for the boys. Boys in interviews often mentioned their interest in knowing how the girls were progressing and were keen not to fall behind.

4.4.5 Image awareness

Around a quarter of boys across all three of the groups observed during Research Phase 2 regarded "looking good in front of the rest of the class" as important. While boys in Year 8 and 9 were mostly unsure, the boys in Year 10 were more prone to dismiss it, with 52.4% claiming it was unimportant. In interviews the majority of boys also dismissed its importance, although observation suggested that these views were often at odds with the roles that boys sought to maintain in class. Boys' behaviours in class were often characterised by confused expressions of inconsistency; the boys in Year 10 seemed particularly sensitive to the threat posed to their image by doing well in class. This often caused them to react unfavourably to the teacher's attempts to commend them publicly or draw attention to them. In one instance the teacher's warm compliments on an excellent poster were met with a mixture of pleasure and embarrassed grunts. When the teacher suggested that the work be shown to the Head the boy uncertainly articulated a half-objection and suggested that his friend's poster be submitted instead. He refused to allow the researcher to see his work, pointing out its poor quality, a claim which was clearly inaccurate.

On another occasion the teacher's attempts to make the most potentially disruptive boy in the group the centrepiece of the lesson, by describing his road accident, was received by the boy with apparent apathy, which the teacher found to be extremely frustrating. The boy, who usually enjoyed being the centre of attention, could not, it seemed, resolve being thrust into the limelight by legitimate means; centre stage was usually achieved through his own disruptive behaviour. In the view of the researcher, it appeared that he could not risk damaging his well-established 'tough' image in class through complying with the teacher, even though the teacher was attempting to gratify him.

There are obvious difficulties in attributing boys' behaviours to their image awareness, particularly as boys seem to have little understanding of the phenomenon themselves when it is directly addressed. Contradictory behaviours in class, such as the two described, seem to point towards the confusion felt by boys in reconciling their desire to do well in the subject with continuing to enjoy the esteem of their friends. While researchers such as Willis (1977) have reached similar conclusions, it should be made clear that such a hypothesis can only be based on the researcher's individual interpretation of actions.

4.4.6 The role of the teacher

Pupils of both sexes frequently indicated that the effect of individual teaching styles on their learning was paramount. Questions about the pupils' reasons for their enjoyment of the subject and their claims to be working hard were answered, in the overwhelming majority of cases, with references to the teacher's perceived competence:

Boy (Year 10, School E): "It's actually because of the teacher. Years 7, 8

and 9 I found a bit boring because you just had to sit down and shut up and listen. This year there's a bit of humour in it as well....We've got a good teacher."

Boys (Year 8, School D):

M: "We've had more of a laugh [this year], he's funny. It's because of the teacher....."

G: "He's a good teacher. Star teacher definitely. You have to have a good teacher."

When pupils in single-sex groups were asked why they felt differently about learning French, most referred first of all to the change of teacher and teaching style. Many negative views derived from pupils comparing their current teacher's style with a previous teacher who they had perceived to be better.

"Having a good relationship with the teacher" was identified as important by 65% of the boys who completed Pupil Questionnaire 4, while 15% saw it as unimportant. The teacher's sense of humour was deemed to be of even greater significance: 86.7% of boys, and 81.9% of girls, classed it as important. It was frequently mentioned in interviews and was a salient feature of the Year 8 and 10 boys' classes, contrasting sharply with the Year 9 class.

A significant percentage of the boys and girls who completed Pupil Questionnaire 4 - 78.3% and 76.4% respectively - classed as important "the teacher explaining the aims of the lesson at the start". This appeal can probably be attributed to pupils' general preference for clearly structured lessons; there is, perhaps, a greater need for it in modern languages where the outcomes are not necessarily clearly formulated or tangible and many activities, particularly speaking, do not conform to the

conventional notion of schoolwork. This response is of particular interest since teachers were rarely observed presenting such an overview.

Several pupils, particularly boys, were critical of teachers who failed to provide adequate or appropriate revision opportunities:

Boy (Year 9, School D): “They don’t give us a chance to go over the work we’ve done. They expect us to do a lot of it at home, but you don’t do it because you think that’s too hard, forget about it. We need some lessons where you revise. You forget about the things you’ve done in Year 7, the easy stuff.”

Girl (Year 9, School D): “If we don’t understand a word she won’t go back and explain it. We have to carry on to the next subject, so we just leave it, not understanding. That’s why I’ve found it so hard.”

The girls in this group also commented on the teacher’s failure to revise the mistakes they had made in tests, which they regarded as a lost learning opportunity.

Teachers’ ideas of revision work do not, it seems, necessarily tally with pupils’; boys’ preference for active, whole-class revision was expressed through objections from Year 9 boys when the teacher handed out worksheets intended to be worked through as revision. Such comments might also suggest that pupils were not receiving adequate guidance on how to revise, and needed teacher input to steer them through the awesome task of learning a plethora of foreign words by rote.

A similar lack of coherence and continuity was noticed by pupils who were taught by different teachers from one year to the next. Girls in Year 8 highlighted the disadvantages of being taught by several different supply teachers within one year, each of which “just did what they wanted to do” (School D). One Year 8 boy underlined both the importance of the teacher explaining new concepts to pupils and implied the

problems encountered when a change of teacher results in new learning habits being forced onto pupils:

(School D): We're not learning as we did last year. We're doing it in a totally different way. It's a bit harder... Last year we'd write it down and the teacher would explain it but, like, we don't this year. We've just got it on paper and we put it in our books."

Boys' preference for active learning, it seems, is not accommodated in the distribution of pre-printed vocabulary lists.

In interviews most pupils seemed, on the whole, quite satisfied with the amount of target language spoken by the teacher in class; like tests, its necessity was given priority over the difficulty and frustration it sometimes caused. The responses to Pupil Questionnaire 4 revealed, however, that pupils did not necessarily enjoy "lessons in which the teacher speaks mainly French"; 35% of boys and 51.5% of girls claimed to dislike such lessons, with only 13.3% of boys and 9.7% of girls voting positively.

4.4.6.1 The sex of the teacher

The issue of whether the sex of the teacher was perceived by pupils to affect their learning was also raised in questionnaires and interviews. The pupils' responses should be seen against a learning background dominated by female teachers; 51.9% of the 799 pupils who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 3 had had no experience of being taught by a male teacher. Conversely, only 4% had only ever been taught by males. Pupils' limited contact with male teachers of modern languages should be borne in mind when considering their responses.

Most pupils are, it seems, not convinced of the benefits of being taught by a teacher of the same sex as themselves. In response to the following item on Pupil

Questionnaire 3, “It’s better to be taught by a teacher of the same sex as yourself”, 47.3% of pupils disagreed, while 36.2% were unsure. In interviews a considerable number claimed to perceive no difference between being taught by male and female teachers, some insisting that there were greater differences between individual teachers regardless of their sex, and that it was the quality of their teaching that mattered:

Boy (Year 9, School C): “It’s different teachers, not just different sex teachers, it’s just different teachers really.”

Boy (Year 9, School D): “I’ve been taught by two women in French and I would just accept a man to teach us. I’m not bothered. I don’t think there’d be any change. It’s if you’re being teached (sic) good.Not just like make everyone sit and give you a big lecture. They actually teach, they do games and all that.....”

Some pupils in interviews who initially denied any differences in the teaching approaches of males and females subsequently went on to describe some. This could, perhaps, be seen as confirmation of the assertion made in Chapter 1, Section 1.3.6.4, that many pupils’ initial answers may be determined by their reluctance to be seen as sexist. Pupils’ awareness of the teacher’s sex does, however, appear to be heightened in single-sex groups, a point explored further in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.4.

4.5 The importance of variables relating to the learning environment

4.5.1 Class size

Most boys and girls seemed to agree that modern languages are best taught in relatively small classes. 64.3% of the boys who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 3, and 59% of the girls, agreed that a small class was better, while 51.7% of the boys in single-sex groups felt that it was important.

Year 8 girls who were being taught French and German by the same teacher, and were learning French in a single-sex group and German in a mixed group in School B, unanimously expressed a preference for German in interviews. They partially accounted for this by describing the teacher's more varied approach to teaching German. Discussion with staff after the interview revealed that their French group, the single-sex group, was far larger than the German group, containing over 30 pupils. In this instance, the smaller class size in German may have facilitated the teacher's livelier approach, thereby influencing the girls' attitudes to the subject and the grouping.

The Year 10 girls in School E qualified their preference for smaller classes by referring to the comparative difficulty of French:

G: "Small classes [are important]."

K: "'Cos we have to wait half an hour for Ms. X to see our work, and it's harder for her. You end up having a go at her."

AB: "How many are in the group?"

K: "25-30."

G: "In science we've got bigger classes than that."

D: "But science is all in English. French is a lot harder than that. You need a lot more of the teacher's attention really."

Perceptive comments such as this clearly illustrate pupils' understanding of how the learning environment may influence their achievements in what is perceived to be a difficult subject.

4.5.2 Setting by ability

Responses to Pupil questionnaire 4 suggest that boys may attach considerable importance to learning a modern language in a group set by ability, echoing Powell's findings (1986); 76.7% of boys rated this as important. The pupils in School D seemed to appreciate this most, perhaps because the single-sex sets had also, for the first time in modern languages, taken into account pupils' ability. Boys felt that this was part of the reason why they were now working better:

(Year 9, School D):

D: "I suppose it's top set as well, isn't it? So there's more people around me who want to get on with their work, so I get on with my work as well."

A: "[I'm working] better, I think, because we're in sets as well. So everyone's more at the same level."

Some boys also felt that weaker boys were ridiculed in mixed ability sets.

4.5.3 Friends

Numerous boys who commented positively on the single-sex group qualified this by saying that they enjoyed being with their friends. Boys' responses to this item, which appeared in Pupil Questionnaires 3 and 4, were very similar, with 66.4% of boys in the whole sample of 799 claiming to like being in a group with their friends, and 65% of the single-sex boys seeing this as important.

Boys in interviews frequently made the observation that they felt more relaxed in single-sex groups because most of their friends were male:

(Year 9, School D): "I feel really confident because I'm in with my friends."

(Year 9, School C):

P: “I think [the single-sex group] is a good idea ‘cos you feel more comfortable ‘cos you know all of the boys and you don’t know the girls as well.”

A: “Yeh. You’re with all your friends and you can just be yourself really.”

4.5.4 Timetabling

The boys’ responses to Pupil Questionnaire 4 reflected a division of opinion on the importance of the time at which the lesson was taught: 38.3% of boys saw this as important, and 33.3% unimportant. In interviews, however, boys frequently argued that because languages was a more difficult subject that demanded concentration it should be taught when boys were mentally alert - in the morning, rather than after the lunchtime football match. Such views reinforce those frequently expressed by teachers who recognise the importance of timetabling foreign language classes appropriately. The point was first raised, unprompted, by a boy in Year 8 in School D who recognised that afternoon timetabling of French lessons had an effect on his ability to learn:

“I don’t mind French, I think it’s a good subject and we should be taught it, but the thing I don’t like is somehow, every time I do French it’s always in the afternoon, and I’m always tired in the afternoon. I’d rather just have a subject what I can do easily, and I find French not hard, but you have to, like, concentrate. I’d rather have it in the morning, when I’m fresh.”

The point was reiterated by the boy’s peers in the second interview, after they had been segregated, and when their only contact with French was in the first lesson on Monday mornings and the last lesson on Friday afternoons:

S: “I think if we had it in the second period it might be better. But it’s quite a hard lesson and you have to think a lot and stuff, so.....”

D: “You have to be in the right frame of mind to do the lesson. If you’re not feeling up to it....”

The later cohort of Year 8 boys in the same school highlighted that the difficulty of French made it a special case as far as timetabling was concerned:

M: “After lunch we’re too tired to learn.”

AB: “Is that the same for all subjects?”

G: “No, just for a foreign language. You need to pay more attention, don’t you?”

M: “More than in other subjects, because if you miss something....”

Again, such perceptive pupils seem to recognise that the inherent difficulty of learning a foreign language needs to be addressed in the timetable.

4.5.5 The single-sex setting

Boys’ and girls’ responses to this item in Pupil Questionnaire 4 represented a spread of response to its importance, with the girls valuing it rather more highly than the boys: 21.7% of boys saw it as important, and 38.3% as unimportant, while 34.7% of girls claimed it was important and 34.7% unimportant. A wide variety of ideas and reasons were presented in the interviews and these are described in more detail in Chapter 6.

4.6 Conclusions

Many of these findings seem to confirm popular views on boys’ learning styles; boys respond enthusiastically to visuals, computers, mobility, speaking and clear outcomes. There is, however, a strong indication that the differences between boys and girls are less pronounced than might be expected, and that pupil personality may

exercise greater influence on pupils' preferences. Pupils' liking of speaking, for example, often seemed to be determined by their self-confidence, with more reserved pupils preferring reading and writing activities.

The importance of the teaching style was highlighted by pupils of both sexes and observation in class seemed to confirm that the learning environment created by the teacher, their relationship with the class and the range of activities they employed had an important effect on pupil motivation.

The difficulty of French, compared with other subjects, was frequently mentioned by boys; this, it was suggested by some, should be taken into account in timetabling. Boys, particularly, seemed to lack an awareness of how to approach language learning; there was little evidence of teachers incorporating the feature of communicative language teaching identified by Mitchell (1994): reflection on learning strategies. Boys seemed to find it particularly difficult to become independent users of the language, a phenomenon which may also be attributed to the lack of opportunities and guidance given to them in class to enable them to manipulate the language creatively. As numerous teachers pointed out however, teaching styles are heavily influenced by the demands of examination syllabuses. Many agreed that Mitchell's criticism of graded objectives schemes may, perhaps, equally be applied to the methodology and syllabuses of today:

“Some of these schemes....offered little more language than the learning by heart of situationally relevant phrases and vocabulary, and failed to lead the learner systematically to linguistic independence and creativity.”

(1994, p. 35-6)

Chapter 5

Pupils' attitudes to modern foreign languages

5. Introduction

This chapter examines pupils' attitudes to modern foreign languages by considering their responses to a range of affective variables: age; parental approval; contact with native speakers; perceptions of their ability, and of the importance and relevance of language learning; perceptions of different languages; and the single-sex grouping. Data is derived principally from the following sources:

- interviews with pupils;
- Pupil Questionnaire 2 administered at various stages of the single-sex initiatives;
- Pupil Questionnaire 3 administered to 799 pupils in 1997;
- Pupil Questionnaire 4 completed by pupils in three single-sex cohorts in 1998;

Section 3.2.5.5 describes the interview process in this study, and a fuller description of the questionnaires is also given in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4.1. Examples of each questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

The chapter begins by attempting to define the term 'attitude' and goes on to highlight the importance of the relationship between pupils' attitudes and their academic achievements.

The second section discusses pupils' enjoyment of modern foreign languages, locating pupils' views within a generic enjoyment of school and of other school subjects, and compares the preconceptions of ab initio foreign language learners on

their arrival at secondary school with the attitudes of older pupils. It also considers the relative importance of two factors on influencing attitudes: parental approval and contact with native speakers.

The third section explores pupils' perceptions of their competence in language learning, focusing on the perceived difficulty of the subject and on their evaluation of their own ability and that of the opposite sex.

The fourth section compares boys' and girls' views on the relevance and vocational benefits of language learning and considers whether the subject is invested with a feminine image.

The fifth section briefly considers pupils' perceptions of and preferences for different languages.

5.1 Defining 'attitude'

Excessive usage of the term 'attitude' would seem to conceal, and often ignore, the inherent difficulty in defining and identifying this construct. Plato's classical definition of attitude identifies three components: cognition, comprising the individual's thoughts and beliefs; affect, the individual's feelings; and readiness for action (in Baker, 1992, p. 12). As Baker has highlighted, the first two may often be in conflict with each other and the researcher should be aware that the individual's professed beliefs, or opinions, may belie covert feelings suppressed by a fear of diverging from conformist public opinion. This point is taken up in the fourth section of this chapter. Individuals' behaviours may also be inconsistent with their verbal or written statements, a possibility which argues strongly for the employment of multiple methods, including observation, to enhance reliability.

This study is unable to take account of individuals' behaviours through longitudinal observation. Pupils' attitudes are monitored principally through their responses in interviews and to questionnaires. It should, therefore, be remembered that the views they expressed through these instruments are not necessarily representative of their true attitudes. Responses in interviews may well have been distorted by the halo effect and the interview venue, as described in Section 3.2.5.2, while questionnaire answers may have been influenced by the way in which questionnaires were administered by teachers in the occasional absence of the researcher. Pupil responses in general may also have been coloured by media coverage at that time of the countries associated with the languages being studied by pupils. These responses represent a snapshot of pupils' immediate responses to certain issues pertaining to teaching and learning modern languages. Further research is needed to probe more closely individuals' thinking behind their answers.

5.2 The importance of attitude in learning modern foreign languages

Recent research prompted by political and public concern about the underachievement of boys has highlighted the influence of pupils' attitudes to school on their academic performance (Keys & Fernandes, 1993; Graham, 1994; Barber, 1996). Varying attitudes to different subjects, it appears, may also produce varying degrees of success. Pupils' attitudes to modern languages may play a particularly important role in determining their success for the following two reasons: the intrinsic nature of the subject itself, and the late stage at which pupils are introduced to the subject. Elaborating on this first point, Gardner identifies as a unique feature of language learning the demands it makes on the individual:

“... students are not asked simply to learn about the language; they are

required to learn the language, to take it in, as it were, and make it part of their behavioural repertoire.”

(Gardner, 1985, p. 6)

This internalisation of foreign behaviours requires a certain empathy and openness on the part of students, particularly since, Gardner argues, the familiar cultural frame of reference present in all other school subjects is absent from modern languages. In a subject that is so heavily interpersonal, as opposed to being led by an impersonal, factual content, success is necessarily highly dependent on a positive, receptive attitude.

In seeking to account for girls’ earlier underachievement in science, Whyte highlights the fact that the decline in girls’ performance ostensibly begins at a time when pupils are confronted with the problematics of becoming an adult woman or man (in Kelly, 1981, p. 266). Succeeding or failing in certain subjects may be seen as an expression of the pupil’s sexual identity, and pupils may be reluctant to affiliate themselves with subjects associated with the opposite sex. This argument is particularly pertinent to modern languages which pupils begin learning at a comparatively late stage of their personal development, at a time when attitudes are heavily shaped by heightened sexual, and gender, awareness.

It should also be remembered that, owing to social influences, pupils probably approach modern languages with far more preconceptions than other subjects. The media coverage of international relations, advertising campaigns using national stereotypes, contact with native speakers in this country and abroad are all likely to inform pupils’ image of the subject.

5.3 Pupils' enjoyment of modern foreign languages

While enjoyment is not to be confused with motivation, for, as Gardner points out, motivation is a combination of both favourable attitudes and efforts to achieve the desired goal (Gardner, 1985, p. 10), it is nevertheless an important factor in creating positive attitudes. Both the HMI survey (1985) and Batters' study (1988) found that enjoyment was a significant factor in pupils' decisions to continue studying a language.

The disparity between boys' and girls' attitudes to modern foreign languages has frequently been described in research literature (Burstall, 1974; Batters, 1985; Powell, 1986; APU, 1987; Loulidi, 1990; Aplin, 1991). The more favourable attitudes of girls are often found to be reflected in their more favourable predisposition to school in general; a recent survey of five UK secondary schools, for instance, found a marked difference in boys' and girls' attitudes to school, with the boys' attitudes showing a steady decline after Year 7 (Graham, 1994, p. 3-5). Such findings are to some degree borne out in the results of Pupil Questionnaire 3 in this study, completed by 799 pupils: while 37.4% of girls claimed to enjoy school, compared with 31.2% of boys, 11.2% of the boys said that they disliked school, compared with only 5.7% of the girls.

The disparity is considerably more marked, however, in pupils' responses to modern languages. In response to the statement "I enjoy learning French/German", 28% of boys registered their disagreement, compared with 16.1% of girls, and 22.7% agreed, compared with 30.8% of girls.

While the girls' greater enthusiasm for languages is clear, the number of boys agreeing with this statement - almost a quarter - might be regarded as some grounds for optimism. These percentages should, however, be placed in the context of pupils' responses to being asked to select their favourite and least favourite subjects in the

same questionnaire. French was cited most often as boys' least favourite subject; 17.3% of boys claimed that French was their least favourite subject, while German emerged as their third least favourite. The girls' responses to this question might be regarded as the cause for even greater alarm: 14.7% of girls claimed that French was their least favourite subject, rendering it second only to mathematics as their least popular subject.

In interviews in this study, boys were more likely than girls to name modern languages as their least favourite subject: four boys and one girl named French, and one girl named German. Conversely, five girls and two boys chose French as their favourite subject. These findings are consistent with other studies of pupils' subject preferences, such as those conducted by Duckworth and Entwistle (1974), Ormerod (1975), and Pratt et al (1984) but should be considered alongside certain other variables which characterised these pupils. Of the five pupils who named French as their least favourite subject, three, two boys and one girl, were described by teachers as both disaffected and of low ability. Of the other two boys, one, in Year 10, qualified his dislike by describing how difficult he found French, while the other, in Year 9, attributed his negative attitude to his experience of being taught in a single-sex group by a teacher whose class he had never been in before.

Of those pupils who named French as their favourite subject, the two boys, in Year 8, were both being taught in a boys' group and attributed their enjoyment to the teacher. One of the three girls whose favourite subject was French named her least favourite subject as German and this dislike was shared to a lesser degree by the other two girls. The influence of single-sex groupings on pupil attitudes is described in more detail towards the end of this chapter but attention is drawn to it, and other variables, here to illustrate how pupil preferences may be determined by factors other than, or in

conjunction with, the sex of the pupil, such as ability and personality. It should also be noted that both questionnaire and interview responses suggest that the majority of pupils do not have an extreme like or dislike for modern languages.

5.3.1 Age and exposure to language learning

In line with other studies, Batters' research (1988) discovered that pupils' attitudes to French was age-related. In Year 7, when pupils were asked to react to the statement, "I am looking forward to studying this foreign language next year" there was a fairly equal spread of distribution across the three responses. Two years later, at the end of Year 9, both boys and girls displayed considerably more negativity in their response to the same statement; half of the girls, and almost two-thirds of the boys disagreed with the statement (Batters, 1988, p. 99).

Figure XIV shows percentages derived from a questionnaire completed by 210 Year 7 pupils at School B at the beginning of their first language lesson. The number of positive responses may reasonably be judged to be somewhat inflated as a result of pupils wishing to make a positive impression on their teachers in the first lesson, but the figures suggest that later differences in boys' and girls' attitudes are rooted in these differential preconceptions of learning languages.

Figure XV, showing boys' responses by year group to the statement on Pupil Questionnaire 3, "I enjoy learning French/German" suggests a deterioration in boys' attitudes to French as they grow older although, in contrast to Batters' findings, the decline does not seem to take effect until after Year 9. Until that stage boys' enjoyment of languages even seems to increase marginally each year, although an increasing

FIGURE XIV

“Are you looking forward to learning languages?”
The responses of Year 7 pupils in their first modern languages lesson in secondary school

	n	YES	NOT SURE	NO	NO RESPONSE
BOYS	96	72.6%	22.1%	5.3%	0%
GIRLS	114	88.8%	10.3%	0.9%	0%
BOYS + GIRLS	210	80.7%	16.2%	3.1%	0%

FIGURE XV

“I enjoy learning French/German”
The responses of boys by year group
(n=382)

YEAR GROUP	n	YES	IT’S OK	NO	NO RESPONSE
7	63	25.8%	43.5%	30.6%	0.1%
8	117	26.1%	47.8%	26.1%	0%
9	85	28.4%	56.8%	14.8%	0%
11	117	14.3%	46.4%	39.3%	0%

uncertainty in Year 9 is suggested by the greatest number of 'It's OK' votes. Such statistics should, however, be viewed with caution, given that the cohorts are neither equal in number nor constitute representative parallel samples.

Similar uncertainty is reflected in the Year 9 girls' responses, while the percentage of positive responses from each year group suggests that girls' attitudes to modern languages are more favourable than boys' throughout school. The disparity is most evident in Year 11 and would seem to undermine the theory that boys' increased negativity at this stage is a common phenomenon amongst all pupils and symptomatic of exam pressure, rather than a reaction to the subject itself.

In interviews a number of pupils described enjoying languages more in Years 7, 8 and 9 than in Years 10 and 11 when, ostensibly, the novelty value had diminished, topics already worked through were being revisited and the level of difficulty had increased. This loss of interest is reflected in boys' responses to Question 12 on Pupil Questionnaire 3, "I enjoyed French/German more in Year 7/8/9 than this year"; in Year 8 31.3% of boys agreed, while in Year 11 the percentage increased to 42.6%. These percentages only take into account the boys taught in mixed groups to control for the possibility that single-sex educated boys' responses could be coloured by their reactions to the new setting.

5.3.2 Parental approval as an affective variable

Cross-tabulation of the responses to statements in Pupil Questionnaire 3, "My parents are glad I'm learning French/German" with responses to "I enjoy learning French/German" suggests that there is a correlation between parental support and

pupils' attitudes to the subject. Of those pupils who claimed to enjoy language learning, 79.2% said that their parents were glad, and only 2.4% that their parents were not glad. Of those who claimed to dislike languages, only 27% said that their parents were glad they were learning the language.

Parents of daughters seem to be slightly more approving than parents of sons; 59.6% of girls claimed that their parents were glad, compared with 54.8% of boys, and 7% that they were not glad, compared with 10.9% of boys. These figures are, however, derived from pupils' perceptions of their parents' views. A more reliable picture might, of course, be obtained by questioning parents themselves, but the involvement of parents was outside the remit of this study, given its central focus on pupils' and teachers' perceptions.

5.3.3 Contact with native speakers abroad as an affective variable

The APU survey (1987) found significant differences between the views of pupils who had been to France and those who had not. In interviews a number of pupils attributed their high motivation in language learning to having had the opportunity to communicate with native speakers on exchanges, trips or family holidays. The suggestion that motivation is dependent on the provision of such opportunities may, of course, have serious implications for the large number of pupils, often from low-income homes, who are denied the experience of travel abroad; of the 799 pupils who completed Pupil Questionnaire 3, 52.7% of pupils had never visited a country where the foreign language was spoken. Pupils' experiences of travel abroad varied widely from school to school: in the school with the most affluent catchment area, School C, 66.7% of pupils had been to a target language country more than once while in School

D, an inner-city school, a comparable percentage - 73.4% - had never had this opportunity.

The lack of opportunities for use of the language in a real context might well be anticipated to have an adverse effect on pupils' attitudes to languages. The consequences might be considered to be particularly serious for boys if their motivation, as discussed in Chapter 1, is largely instrumental. A comparison of the two schools mentioned above reveals that there is something of a difference in pupils' attitudes, suggesting a positive correlation with visits abroad. Of the School C pupils, who had the most opportunities to use the language abroad, 33.3% of pupils claimed to enjoy learning languages. Of the School D pupils, who had the fewest opportunities, 26.6% of pupils expressed their enjoyment.

The possibility that this difference may well be attributable to other factors should not be ignored. It would seem, however, that if boys are denied this opportunity their attitudes are more likely to be negative. Analysis of responses to Questionnaire 3 revealed that while 23.7% of boys who had been abroad more than once claimed that they did not enjoy languages, 30.2% of boys who had never been abroad expressed their dislike. This latter figure invites an interesting comparison with girls who had never been abroad; 17.3% of them expressed their dislike, suggesting that contact with native speakers abroad may well be perceived to be of greater importance by boys than girls.

5.4 Pupils' perceptions of their ability

5.4.1 The difficulty of learning modern foreign languages

In spite of the GCSE ostensibly accommodating all ability levels researchers have found that many pupils continue to perceive modern foreign languages as more

difficult than other subjects. In Clark's survey of 396 Year 11 pupils, 36% ranked modern languages as their most difficult subject and 62% placed it in the top three of ten subjects in terms of perceived difficulty (Clark, 1998, p. 32). Both Hawkins (1996) and Clark (1998) have suggested that much of this difficulty may be attributed to pupils' comparatively short period of compulsory learning; it is the only 'foundation subject' prescribed by the National Curriculum which is not begun until Key Stage 3, generally in the first year of secondary schooling, at age eleven or twelve. Hawkins elaborates further on this point:

"...many eleven year-olds, perhaps a majority, begin their exploration of the FL handicapped by insecure grasp of the mother tongue and lack of awareness of how language works."

(Hawkins, 1996, p. 3)

It is reasonable to assume, on the basis of much research highlighting the slower rate of boys' linguistic development in childhood, that boys would be over-represented in this potential majority.

The conclusions of earlier research that a correlation exists between pupils' attitudes and their general academic ability are unsurprising given the academic objectives of the 'O' level examination (Jordan, 1941 in Batters, 1988; Morris, 1978, p. 181). Jordan, for instance, writes in his study of a selective all-boys school:

"Attitude towards French tends to vary in accordance with the general standard of academic attainment."

(op.cit., p. 19)

A comparison of the responses of lower and higher ability pupils taught in single-sex groups in School D would suggest that this is not the case with the new GCSE examination which targets a much more comprehensive audience. Very little

difference was recorded in pupils' enjoyment of French in responses to Pupil Questionnaire 3. 27.3% of lower ability pupils, and 27.7% of higher ability pupils said they enjoyed learning French/German, and the higher ability pupils registered experiencing more difficulty than their less able counterparts - 31.9% found French difficult, compared with 21.2%. The role played by other variables in determining these responses, not least the teacher's ability to differentiate effectively, should not, of course, be forgotten.

HMI's conclusion in 1985 that pupils experience much more difficulty, and consequently have more negative attitudes, in the last two years of schooling would seem to be corroborated both by Clark's research (1998, p. 35) and by this survey. There is, it would seem, a broad gap between the perceptions of difficulty of boys and girls at Key Stage 3 and those at Key Stage 4. Responses to the statement in Pupil Questionnaire 3, "French/German has been much more difficult this year than last year" show a clear escalation: 55.4% of pupils in Year 8 answered 'Yes'; 59.7% in Year 9; and 74.9% in Year 11. While only a marginal difference was recorded between the responses of boys and girls in Year 11 to this statement - 75.2% and 72.4% respectively - the issue of difficulty was raised more often in interviews by the Year 10 boys from School E than by any other cohort. They particularly described the problems they had experienced in keeping up after they had been absent from lessons, and the difficulty of writing. This greater awareness of difficulty could, however, be attributed to the transferral of a number of these boys from a lower ability mixed group to the new all-boys higher-ability group.

While many pupils, particularly those at Key Stage 4, may struggle with the difficulties of learning a language, the findings of Pupil Questionnaire 3 would suggest that this problem is not sex-specific. Boys' and girls' perceptions of difficulty are, it

seems, remarkably similar. Most pupils - 57% of boys and girls - claim to experience difficulty 'sometimes' and roughly equal numbers - 29.5% of boys and 28.8% of girls - agree that the subject is difficult.

5.4.2 Pupils' evaluations of their ability

Responses to Pupil Questionnaire 3 seem to confirm the conclusions of other research that boys display a general tendency to rate their own academic ability highly, while girls display more modesty (O'Brien, 1985, p. 36-40; Batters, 1988, p. 128; Graham, 1994, p. 15). 44.5% of boys agreed with the statement, "I think I am quite good at French/German" compared with 38.9% of the girls. In interviews, boys were often less inhibited than girls in rating their ability:

(Year 8, School B): "I prefer French because I'm very good at it. I'm a natural at it."

Boys did not, on the whole, rate their ability as superior to girls', a finding which supports Batters' conclusion (Batters, 1988, p. 134). Both in interviews and in response to the questionnaire, the overwhelming majority - 73.9% of boys and 79.9% of girls - claimed that there was no difference in boys' and girls' abilities in languages.

In interviews a number of boys did, however, demonstrate an awareness of girls' alleged academic superiority:

(Year 7, School B): "Mr. ... says that girls get better Ms, but I don't think there's any difference."

(Year 8, School D): "When I was watching the news it was saying that girls are proving to be more clever than boys in all subjects."

It is, it seems, only in the later years of schooling that boys are more likely to accept that girls are academically more successful. This realisation could well generate

demotivation amongst boys and is, according to one Year 10 boy in School E, a strong argument for segregation:

“... ‘Cos when you’ve got girls in the room, and you hear their results, compared with the boys’, you might feel a bit low. It makes you feel better with boys, who are on average the same.”

5.5 Pupils’ perceptions of the importance and relevance of language learning

Pupils’ perceptions of the relevance of language learning is generally acknowledged by researchers to be a highly important factor in creating extrinsic motivation to do well in the subject (Powell, 1986; Graham & Rees, 1995; Clark, 1998). Graham and Rees’s conclusion (1995, p. 18) that this is more important for instrumentally motivated boys would seem to be corroborated by this study. The boys in the three single-sex groups who completed Pupil Questionnaire 4 in June 1998 attributed more importance to this than their female counterparts: 66.7% rated as ‘important’ “knowing that you’ll use your French in the future”, compared with 48.6% of the girls. While girls may more readily accept the necessity of learning a language (Clark & Trafford, 1996, p. 42), and often seem happy to enjoy it without assessing its future applications, boys’ attitudes are often determined by an awareness of the usefulness of language learning:

Boy (Year 9, School S): “Knowing you’ll use your French in the future [is important]. I ain’t never going to use it, so there’s no point in learning.”

A number of studies have drawn attention to the way in which boys’ estimation of the usefulness of languages, unlike girls’, diminishes significantly over time (O’Brien, 1985, p. 49; Batters, 1988, p. 108). The results of Pupil Questionnaire 3 show

that while there is only a marginal disparity in boys' and girls' responses to the statement "French/German is a useful subject", with 60% of the boys and 62.6% of the girls in agreement, a noticeable decline is apparent in all pupils' attitudes between Years 8 and 11: in Year 8 63.3% of all pupils claimed that French was useful, while in Year 11 the percentage decreased to 55.7%. Paradoxically, the year group often cited as that in which the symptoms of demotivation first become apparent, Year 9, gave the most positive response: 70% of Year 9 pupils claimed to recognise the usefulness of languages. It deserves to be noted that the majority of these pupils, in Schools E and C, were being taught in single-sex groups, pointing to the possibility that these groups were more conducive to making pupils aware of the practical applications of language learning.

The disparity between boys' and girls' evaluation of the usefulness of languages is most evident in Year 11: 28.8% of boys reject the idea that learning a language is useful, compared with 12.1% of girls, and 51.4% of boys and 61.2% of girls agree. Further evidence of this development is revealed in pupils' responses to "French/German is a waste of time": 30.4% of boys in Year 11 agree with this highly negative statement, compared with only 9% of the girls. It is, of course, significant that this disparity, and boys' readiness to subscribe to what amounts to a statement of the futility of learning a language, is most evident in the year when pupils sit their GCSE examinations.

In interviews pupils often claimed that languages were not as important as other subjects:

(Boys, Year 8, School D)

S: "...French probably wouldn't get you a job, but if you're good at maths and English..."

C: “Maths and English, that’s more like general knowledge, isn’t it?”

M: “Science...those are the sorts of things you’ve got to know. I don’t like them, but I have to do them, that’s my view.”

Considerable hesitation was shown by many pupils when asked in interviews if they would use their languages in the future, and responses to the statement in Pupil Questionnaire 4, “I think I will use my French/German when I leave school” met with a high number of negative responses: 43.8% of boys and 38.9% of girls claimed that they would not.

The benefits of learning a language were largely seen in terms of holidays and career prospects; in line with a recent survey of Year 9 pupils there were very few references to the possible social and cultural advantages (Lee, Buckland & Shaw, 1998, p. 44). Pupils’ perceptions of language use were restricted to opportunities abroad; none of the pupils interviewed referred to the possibility of using a foreign language in the UK, a misconception which is perhaps endorsed by the predominance of overseas scenarios in the GCSE examination. The following response to the interview question, “Do you think you will use your French in the future?” is typical of many:

Boys (Year 7, School B)

R: “Some people might want to go on holiday, but some people don’t like the French, so they won’t go over.”

D: “It’d be pretty useful if you like going to France.”

C: “It depends. Me and S, like, we’re going on the French exchange, so it’ll help us there, won’t it? So sometimes it can come in useful.”

Clark’s conclusion that higher ability pupils are more likely to perceive the relevance of languages to their careers (Clark, 1995, p. 320) seems to be ratified by this study. In response to Pupil Questionnaire 3, 39.8% of pupils of lower ability claimed

that they would not use French or German when they left school, compared with 19.2% of higher ability pupils. In interviews, the greatest awareness of the vocational relevance of learning languages was demonstrated by boys and girls at School C who, it should be remembered, were taught in higher ability single-sex groups:

(Girls, Year 9):

V: "... if you work on an aeroplane as an air hostess you need to know different languages, and travel agents. If you got transferred to a different country as well."

A: "Or if you're an engineer or a chemist..."

R: "Or a French and German teacher."

(Boy, Year 9): "...European languages would be [useful] because now it's all Europe and everything, so, like your job, you're going to be moving around Europe a lot. It would be handy to know different European languages....My Dad works in Holland..."

The socio-economic background of these children should also be taken into account. School C was attended by pupils from a relatively affluent catchment area who, subsequently, had more opportunities to practise their language abroad; 66.7% had been more than once to a country where the foreign language was spoken. Analysis of the questionnaire results seems to lend further support to the theory that the more contact pupils have with native speakers abroad the more likely they are to perceive the usefulness of the language in the future. Of pupils who had never been to a target language country 20.7% responded affirmatively to the statement in Questionnaire 3, "I think I will use my French/German when I leave school". This figure contrasts sharply with the response rate of those who had been abroad more than once; almost half - 48.5% - responded positively. This suggests that the experience of travel abroad, which

is invariably linked to pupils' socio-economic background, is perhaps one of the most important of those variables considered which determine pupils' perceptions of the relevance of languages.

5.5.1 Pupils' perceptions of modern languages as a girls' subject

It is commonly assumed that much male disinterest in modern languages can be attributed to the subject's feminine image, a supposition often perpetuated by speculative research which is unsupported by empirical evidence (see, for instance, Cohen, 1996, p. 124-5). More rigorous studies have revealed that pupils generally demonstrate a reluctance to see the subject as sex-specific (Powell & Littlewood, 1983, p. 38; O'Brien, 1985, p. 40; Weinrich Haste, 1986 in Thomas, 1990, p. 34; Lee, Buckland & Shaw, 1998, p. 46). Interview and questionnaire responses in this study seem to confirm this finding; 95.2% of all pupils claimed, through Pupil Questionnaire 3, that modern languages are equally important for boys and girls, and none of the pupils interviewed perceived the subject to be more appropriate for one sex or the other. The apparent indignation with which interview questions referring to this were often received, however, along with the sometimes exceptionally vehement dismissal of the idea, suggested that pupils' awareness of 'political correctness' may well have influenced their responses, an interpretation shared by Lee, Buckland and Shaw in their account of interviews with Year 9 pupils (1998, p. 46). Analysis of responses to the Pupil Questionnaire 3 item, "Girls are more likely to use languages than boys" suggests a much greater degree of uncertainty than pupils are prepared to admit in interviews for fear of offending: 38.7% were 'not sure'. The spread of responses from boys and girls to this statement was strikingly similar. Around 13% of each responded in the affirmative, a finding which, although not necessarily an accurate reflection of pupils'

true views, at least suggests that, on closer analysis, some difference is perceived by pupils in terms of languages' practical benefits.

5.6 Perceptions of different languages

It was not within the remit of this study to investigate in any depth pupils' perceptions of different languages. Some considerable research, referred to in Chapter 1, has already been conducted in this field (see, for instance, Pritchard, 1987; Rees, 1989; Phillips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993). Reliable comparisons of pupils' views of different languages were also considered unfeasible given the predominance of French in the sample; 73.5% of pupils were learning French as their first foreign language. Three schools offered pupils the opportunity of learning a second language, although in two schools this was restricted to higher ability pupils and in the third, School B, pupils were taught German or Spanish alongside French for one year only, in Year 8.

Of those pupils learning two languages who responded to Pupil Questionnaire 3, the majority- 46.5% - preferred French. German was the second most popular language, attracting 28.8% and Spanish the third, with 11.6%. 13% of pupils claimed to like both languages equally. The preference for German over Spanish cannot be attributed to a difference in sample size as 16% of pupils were learning German as a second language and 16.3% Spanish.

The study provides little evidence that languages other than French are preferred by boys. Asked in Pupil Questionnaire 3 which language they preferred, boys responded more favourably than girls to French: 52.4% preferred French, compared with 41.1% of girls. 34.8% of girls preferred German, compared with 22.3% of boys, and 10.7% of girls preferred Spanish, compared with 12.6% of boys. It should be remembered, however, that this sub-sample of pupils, comprising those learning two

languages, is relatively small, around 32.3% of the whole, and unrepresentative in terms of ability.

5.6.1 Pupils' preferences for different languages

When asked in interviews why they had chosen their second language, German or Spanish, to learn in Year 8, pupils in School B commonly cited one or more of the following reasons: they had heard reports that the language was useful or easy; they had friends or relatives who had some knowledge of the language; or they perceived that the language would be useful on holiday. Most pupils, it seemed, had had little or no contact with their second language, and thus their decisions were largely based on hearsay.

Of those pupils already learning a second language, most claimed to prefer the language that they had been learning longer, usually French. Others based their preferences on the greater opportunities they had had to use that language, either through exchanges or contact with relatives or family friends who spoke the language. Some related their preference to the teaching style, notably the Year 8 girls in School C who preferred German on these grounds, a point mentioned earlier in Section 4.5.1. Only one higher-ability boy mentioned the inherent appeal of one language over another, preferring to speak French rather than German. No other pupils mentioned pronunciation as an important issue. Hawkins' claim that boys are embarrassed by having to imitate the 'nasal vowels' of French and are more prepared to copy German or Spanish sounds (Hawkins, 1987, p. 78) thus finds no support in this study, although different results could obviously be obtained from using a controlled, larger sample. Pupils did not attribute sex-specific images to any languages, although the issue of the

perceived masculinity or femininity of certain languages was never directly addressed by the researcher.

5.7 Conclusions

That boys' and girls' attitudes towards modern languages are seemingly most disparate in Year 11 may be interpreted both as a reflection and cause of the disparity in their GCSE performance in the subject in the same year. The number of Year 11 boys who agree with the statement in Pupil Questionnaire 3, "French/German is a waste of time", 30.4%, is a clear indication of boys' negative attitudes to the subject. While it seems that neither boys nor girls perceive languages as particularly enjoyable, boys' dislike of the subject seems to increase at a much faster rate than girls'. This is, no doubt, exacerbated by pupils' experience of the increased difficulty of the subject at Key Stage 4 and by the dominant perception that languages are irrelevant. Pupils' awareness of the applications of languages is often limited to travel and tourism, a consideration which is not always accommodated in lesson content, rendering the subject, perhaps, doubly irrelevant, as pupils sometimes recognised:

(Boys, Year 9, School D, interview): We keep getting these booklets called, 'An Introduction to France'. They're about wines, and what they do in the Foreign Legion, how many farms there are.....It's more like geography. That's not the sort of thing you need to know if you go to France.

Implicit in this comment is the suggestion that the opportunity to travel abroad underpins pupils' motivation. The evidence of this study suggests both that pupils who travel abroad rate languages more highly and that this variable is likely to have a greater effect on boys' motivation than girls'. The part played by socio-economic factors in creating this opportunity should not be ignored. While social class has been

dismissed by a number of researchers as insignificant (see, for instance, Powell & Littlewood, 1983, p. 37) it seems reasonable to assume that the opportunities children have to travel abroad will be largely dependent on family income.

Chapter 6

Pupils' responses to learning modern foreign languages in single-sex groups

6. Introduction

This chapter discusses pupils' attitudes to learning languages, and their experiences of learning, within a single-sex group. It draws comparisons with the views and experiences of pupils taught in mixed-sex groups and examines the responses of pupils taught in single-sex groups to the four core language skills.

Much of the data employed in this chapter is derived from Pupil Questionnaire 2, and the chapter begins with an outline of how pupils' responses were analysed.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on pupils' attitudes to single-sex grouping per se. It begins by describing pupils' expectations and preconceptions of single-sex grouping, goes on to explore common reasons for enjoying or disliking single-sex teaching groups, pupils' perceptions of how well they work in those groups, the development of their attitudes and their views on the sex of the teacher.

The second part of the chapter focuses specifically on learning modern languages in single-sex groups. It looks at whether pupils' learning can be made more enjoyable by single-sex grouping and at the way in which the grouping might influence pupils' attitudes to the subject. It concludes by narrowing the focus to pupils' responses to specific learning tasks within single-sex groups.

6.1 Data analysis and interpretation

The first part of this chapter draws principally on Pupil Questionnaire 2 completed both by pupils in single-sex groups and their peers in mixed groups at various stages of the single-sex initiative. Questionnaires were completed by:

- 61 pupils from School D in July 1996 before they were segregated the following September;
- 357 pupils in Schools A, B, C and D at the end of one academic year spent in a single-sex group;
- 236 pupils in mixed groups in Schools A, B and C after one academic year.

These groups comprised pupils in the same year group as the pupils in single-sex groups.

- The Year 8, 9 and 10 boys who were the focus of observation in Research Phase 2, and the girls in parallel groups.

These pupils completed the same questionnaire twice, once towards the beginning of the initiative in the autumn term of 1997 and again at the end of the academic year 1998; they totalled 125.

The questionnaires, reproduced in the appendix, examine pupils' enjoyment of languages and ask whether they like being in their single-sex or mixed teaching group. The questionnaire completed by pupils in single-sex groups asks whether they think they are working harder in this group, while that completed by pupils in mixed groups asks whether they think they would enjoy being in a single-sex group and whether they think they would work harder in that group. The questionnaire completed by School D pupils before segregation resembles the mixed groups' questionnaire.

The first three or four questions use a three point attitudinal scale. The final section of the questionnaire was designed not only as an internal reliability control but also to allow pupils to express their feelings about being taught in a single-sex or mixed group using their own words. It constitutes a sentence completion task which requires the pupils to describe and explain briefly their views on learning languages in their teaching group. Analysis of these responses proved to be highly illuminating, if only in terms of providing evidence of pupils' unclear thinking on this issue. Many answers were ambivalent and in some cases seemed to contradict the responses given to the first three or four questions.

Pupils' responses to the free writing section were coded and categorised into broad perceptual bands which are listed below:

- no difference
- distracted by the opposite sex
- social benefits of being with same-sex friends
- social benefits of being with friends of the opposite sex
- educational benefits of being taught with the opposite sex
- criticises characteristics/behaviour of own sex
- criticises characteristics/behaviour of opposite sex
- intimidated by the opposite sex in mixed group/feels more confident in single-sex group
- works better/learns more in a single-sex group
- works better/learns more in a mixed group
- novelty value/different
- recognises differential needs/interests/working pace of the opposite sex

- fear of being in another group without friends
- girls help boys or vice versa
- other reasons

The analysis takes account of some pupils' references to multiple reasons. Only the first two reasons mentioned by pupils could be considered, although the number of pupils mentioning more than two was extremely small. The length of pupils' responses varied widely, from single word answers to several sentences which continued on the reverse side of the questionnaire.

It should be noted that even within these broad categories there was sometimes a wide range of opinion. The category 'social benefits of being with friends of the opposite sex', for instance, accommodates both the view that suggests that the more relaxing or enjoyable environment of a mixed group is conducive to learning, and the view that it offers greater opportunities for socialising and entertainment. It was not always clear from pupils' phrasing which of these, pedagogically sound or unsound, was meant. The use, for instance, of the expression, "a sociable learning experience" (Girl, mixed group, Year 10, School A) may imply one or the other, or even both. Where pupils made explicit reference to the benefits of being exposed to a diversity of others' opinions, and becoming familiar with how the opposite sex functions, this was recorded as 'educational benefits of being taught with the opposite sex'.

The ambivalence of some pupils' answers rendered interpretation extremely difficult, such as: "Their (sic) are no girls in the class, so work is harder, but no girls group doesn't (sic) distract us" (Boy, single-sex group, Year 10, School E). In those cases where the meaning was not immediately clear, no attempt was made to decipher it, and it was not feasible within the limits of the study to cross-examine individuals verbally.

Data obtained from these questionnaires is supplemented by that drawn from interviews, observation, and Pupil Questionnaires 3 and 4.

6.2 Pupils' expectations and preconceptions of single-sex groups

The interview and questionnaire data suggest that pupils generally have negative expectations or preconceptions of single-sex teaching; 61.9% of the pupils in mixed groups claimed in Questionnaire 2 that they would not enjoy being in a single-sex group. This is, of course, unsurprising given that the pupils' experience of schooling had generally been restricted to co-educational classrooms in comprehensive schools where the only subject taught to boys' and girls' groups is a non-academic subject, physical education. It is of interest, however, that pupils' responses to the questionnaire suggest that they think single-sex grouping might benefit their work. In response to the question, "Do you think you would work better in a single-sex group?" the greatest number, 51.7%, were unsure.

Pupils taught in mixed groups were, it seems, generally happy with their experience of the grouping; only 4.7% of pupils claimed that they did not enjoy being taught in a mixed group. Again, this finding must be viewed in the context of pupils' ignorance of any other grouping. Just over a quarter, 25.6%, qualify their satisfaction by referring to the social benefits of being taught with the opposite sex, while a similar number, 24.6%, describe the educational benefits.

The evidence suggests that girls are more likely to have marginally more positive preconceptions and to perceive the potential benefits of single-sex classes. 17.2% of girls, compared with 12.5% of boys, claimed that they would enjoy the experience, while 18%, compared with 10% of boys, said that they thought they would work better. The most common reason given for this preference was an awareness of

boys' foibles: their silliness, immaturity, disruptiveness and loudness. 45% of girls who said that they would enjoy being in a single-sex group cited this reason.

The smaller number of boys and girls in School D who completed questionnaires before they were segregated were somewhat less negative than other pupils in mixed groups in their expectations of single-sex grouping. The majority - 50.8% - were unsure whether they would enjoy the experience, and 44.3% were uncertain whether they would work better. This uncertain optimism can, perhaps, be attributed to pupils' awareness of the rationale behind the school's decision to segregate - to raise achievement - either gained through inference or through teachers having directly addressed the issue with their classes. Girls' expectations are, again, rather more positive than the boys': 42.9% of boys claimed that they would not enjoy being taught in a single-sex group compared with 21.2% of girls. When interviewed, boys' apprehension was considerably more pronounced:

AB: "How did you feel when you were told that you were going to be taught in an all-boys group next year?"

S: "I thought it was a bad idea, 'cos mixing all the boys from all the other classes....for the teacher it may be harder to control. We'll all talk...."

M: "I think it will be a disaster."

AB: "Why?"

M: "Because all boys together...."

D: "We're loud."

M: "We're lively and that. It's bad enough in P.E."

C: "It is."

S: "And I think the forms that we're mixing with and some of the people...."

These boys are, it seems, unanimous in their rejection of the idea for the following two reasons: their own poor behaviour and the fear of being in a group without their friends, reasons also commonly cited in the questionnaires.

Like the girls in the larger sample of those taught in mixed groups, the girls in School D, who were interviewed before the initiative, related their more positive expectations to the potential relief that the new grouping might offer from boys' poor behaviour:

K: "Say, if you're, like, speaking out in a group, it's usually a boy that laughs at you."

N: "We're distracted sometimes by boys because they're messing around."

The reluctant tone of one of the girls, and her reasoning, reflects, however, a considerable number of other girls' responses to the questionnaire:

R: "Well, I think it's an all right idea, but I think you need to work with boys because all our life we'll have to at some point. We can't just stay away from them...."

This awareness of the need to work alongside the opposite sex was expressed much more often by girls than boys in the questionnaire's sentence completion task and can probably be ascribed to girls' understanding of equal opportunities issues. A number of girls voiced strong objections to single-sex setting on the grounds that it was "sexist" but their unclear understanding of this term, demonstrated in interviews, suggests that their usage of it is often borrowed from adult vocabulary and used with only limited understanding of its implications.

6.3 Pupils' attitudes to single-sex groups

6.3.1 Pupils' enjoyment of single-sex groups

Responses to Pupil Questionnaire 3, completed by pupils both in single-sex and mixed groups, suggest that pupils are fairly equally divided in their views on whether single-sex groups are more enjoyable than mixed groups: 35% of all pupils agreed with the statement, "Single-sex groups for French/German are more fun" while 36.7% disagreed. While a rather larger proportion - 49.3% - claimed that "Mixed groups for French/German are more fun" there is, nevertheless, some considerable enthusiasm for single-sex groups: 45.3% of all pupils disagreed with the statement, "Single-sex groups for French/German are boring".

A comparison of boys' and girls' responses to these statements indicates that boys are fractionally more positive than girls in their enjoyment of single-sex groups: 6.5% more boys than girls agreed that single-sex groups are more fun, and 3.9% more rejected the suggestion that they are boring.

Responses to the second question on Pupil Questionnaire 2, "Do you like being in an all-boys/girls group?" reveal, however, that while just under 50% of boys and girls taught in single-sex groups (40.5% and 41.6% respectively) enjoy being in the group, boys are slightly more likely than girls to respond negatively: 23.5% of boys, compared with 17.2% of girls, disagreed.

Analysis of these results by school, summarised in Figure XVI, reveals considerable differences in pupils' responses. The most positive pupils are those in School C who comprise higher-ability pupils, and the boys in this cohort are significantly more positive than their male counterparts in other schools. There is only one other school - School D - in which male pupils are more positive than females.

FIGURE XVI

“Do you like being in an all-boys/girls group?”
The responses of pupils in single-sex groups by school

School A, Year 10 (n = 40)

	n	YES	NOT SURE	NO
BOYS	16	0%	25%	75%
GIRLS	24	37.5%	54.2%	8.3%

School B Year 7 (n = 118)

	n	YES	NOT SURE	NO
BOYS	49	44.9%	30.6%	24.5%
GIRLS	69	63.8%	29%	7.2%

School C, Year 8 (n = 54)

	n	YES	NOT SURE	NO
BOYS	23	71.9%	25%	3.1%
GIRLS	31	66.7%	20.8%	12.5%

School D, Year 9 (n = 199)

		YES	NOT SURE	NO
BOYS	87	44.9%	32.1%	23%
GIRLS	112	30.3%	48.7%	21%

School E, Year 10 (n = 51)

	n	YES	NOT SURE	NO
BOYS	25	14.3%	71.4%	14.3%
GIRLS	26	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%

This school had, at that time, one male teacher and one female teacher, the Head of Department, who both seemed, in observation and according to pupils' reports in interviews, to have highly positive relationships with their male groups. This school also operated a setting policy by ability as well as by sex, a feature not shared by School B, where the disparity in boys' and girls' responses is striking.

The responses of the Year 10 boys in School A and School E suggest that there is a negative correlation with age; the older boys are, the less likely they are to enjoy a single-sex grouping. Two differences between these schools should, perhaps, be considered in any attempt to account for the greater enthusiasm of the boys in School E. While School A taught all pupils in mixed ability groups, the boys in the single-sex group in School E were higher ability pupils, and the boys in School A, unlike those in School E, were taught by a female teacher.

The differences in sample sizes, determined by the numbers of single-sex classes in each school, should also be taken into account: in Schools B and D the whole year group was taught in single-sex groups, while in the other three schools only two classes were involved.

6.3.1.1 Reasons for enjoying single-sex groups

The four reasons most frequently cited by those in single-sex groups who responded positively to the question in Pupil Questionnaire 2, "Do you like being in an all-boys/girls group?" are listed below in descending order of popularity. Percentages in brackets refer to the number of responses within each sex. It should be noted that more girls than boys made comments which were comprehensible or legible: 94 female respondents are considered here, compared with 65 male respondents.

<u>Boys</u>		<u>Girls</u>	
works better in a single-sex group	(35%)	intimidated by the opposite sex/ feels more confident	(35%)
social benefits of being with same sex friends	(20%)	works better in a single-sex group	(29%)
distracted by the opposite sex	(19%)	criticises characteristics/behaviour of opposite sex	(27%)
intimidated by opposite sex/feels more confident	(19%)	social benefits of being with same- sex friends	(10.6%)

Criticism of boys' behaviour in mixed groups, the principal reason behind many girls' preference for single-sex groups, was frequently voiced in interviews, even when girls were unimpressed by the quality of teaching:

(Year 7, School B):

L: "...boys just laugh if you get it wrong and they take the mickey out of you."

R: "Lads are immature. They'll just sit there and somebody will say something and they giggle and mess about."

(Year 8, School C):

R: "The boys just butt in."

V: "And they laugh as well. If you don't know it, it's horrible."

(Year 9, School D):

C: "We talk more....there's no-one laughing at you."

While boys often claimed to be distracted by girls, they were generally far less likely to express direct criticism of girls' behaviour, other than, occasionally, to mention their chattiness in class. One of the reasons cited by a number of boys in their

questionnaires for not liking single-sex groups was that girls offered them assistance in mixed groups. They sometimes also alluded to girls' linguistic superiority:

(Year 10, School A, questionnaire): “[Girls] help us with our work because they usually know more.”

(Year 7, School B, interview): “And they’ve got nice work. You can just, like, borrow... If a girl’s next to us we can concentrate more. Wow, nice work, mind if I copy it?”

The few girls who mentioned boys helping them related this specifically to boys' greater confidence in speaking. It was not, however, always clear whether girls appreciated this because they were encouraged by example to contribute more, or whether it was because they felt that they would not be called upon to contribute as much in class.

Large numbers of boys and girls in interviews and questionnaires mentioned feeling more confident in a single-sex group. While girls often recognised that boys dominated mixed classes, causing them to adopt a more passive role in the group, the boys often acknowledged that in a mixed group they were under “pressure to impress” (Year 8 boy, School C).

Pupils also perceived the benefits of being in a class with friends of the same sex. Boys often felt that this produced a more relaxed atmosphere but did not, like the girls, refer frequently to the mutual support offered by the group:

(Girl, Year 7, School B, questionnaire): “It’s brilliant....if you’re stuck you can ask them a question if Miss is busy.”

(Girl, Year 10, School A, interview): “Our classroom’s like a close-knit community. That’s how it is.....It’s just all one big ‘sister’ group. I don’t see Miss as my teacher, I see her like a big sister.”

The close relationships of the kind described above were often noted as a striking feature of all-girls groups but only rarely observed in boys' groups.

6.3.1.2 Reasons for disliking single-sex groups

The most frequently cited reason for boys' and girls' dislike of the single-sex setting relates to the social disadvantages of not being with the opposite sex. 39% of girls and 31% of boys who claimed in Questionnaire 2 that they did not enjoy being in a single-sex group described "having a laugh" in a mixed group, or commented on language learning being more enjoyable or fun in the company of the opposite sex. These pupils disliked single-sex setting because it was "boring".

The second most frequently cited reason amongst boys refers to criticism of their own sex. 29% of the boys who claimed to dislike being in a single-sex group mentioned the noisiness of their group and to boys "messaging about", an observation also sometimes made in interviews:

(Year 10, School A): "...all boys tend to mess about more, I think."

(Year 7, School B): "You can't learn much in an all-boys group because you're always talking...."

Only 10% of girls criticised their own sex, describing the class as "too quiet" and desiring the "excitement" and entertainment offered by a mixed group, thus subscribing to the view of boys' function in mixed groups held by one girl:

(Mixed class, Year 10, School A): "...it would be boring without the odd fool."

6.3.2 Pupils' perceptions of working in a single-sex group

Responses to Pupil Questionnaire 2 suggest that pupils are more convinced that the single-sex grouping is conducive to hard work than that it is enjoyable; 43.5% of boys and 48.5% of girls claimed that they were working better. In the case of the boys this represents 3% more than those who claimed to be enjoying the group, and 6.9% in the case of girls. Boys who claimed to be working better frequently referred in the sentence completion task to being distracted by the opposite sex in mixed groups and cited the social benefits of being with the same sex. Girls in the same category were much more likely to mention being intimidated by boys in mixed groups or to criticise their behaviour generally. Of those pupils who claimed not to be enjoying the single-sex group, rather more boys than girls nevertheless claim to be working better; 17% of boys responded positively compared with only 2.2% of girls.

In interviews, girls appeared to be much more convinced than boys that their work was benefiting from the new grouping. Amongst boys, particularly, there were considerable differences in the responses of those taught in single-sex groups:

(Year 10, School E): "It's a lot quieter. You get down to your work a lot quicker."

(Year 9, School D): "...most of the class is messing about and the teacher is shouting at them, and they're not getting their work done."

(Year 8, School D): "People concentrate more.... You do more work."

These differences seem largely related to the teacher's management of the group. Those boys who claimed that they were not working as hard usually described the uncontrolled "messing about" of their peers. Observation of the three groups, to whom the three boys quoted above belonged, suggested that the creation of an effective

working environment in an all-boys group is heavily dependent on the ability of the teacher to control the group. The probability that teaching an all-boys group makes more demands of teachers' classroom management skills than teaching an all-girls group is discussed further in Chapter 7. In those groups where teachers appeared to exercise strict control over behaviour, boys often mentioned working together as a team, whereas in less well-disciplined groups fragmentation seemed to ensue, with boys allying themselves with small groups between which there was often confrontation.

6.3.3 The development of pupils' attitudes in single-sex groups

Questionnaire results, interview responses and observation suggest that there is a clear development in pupils' attitudes to single-sex groups and also that there are distinct differences in the responses of individual classes. Figure XVII shows the differing responses of boys in single-sex groups in Years 8, 9 and 10 to a question included first in the Pupil Questionnaire 2 administered in the autumn term of 1997 and again at the end of the academic year, 1998. While those boys in Years 8 and 10 seem to enjoy the group more as the year progresses, the boys in Year 9 become increasingly dissatisfied. The parallel girls' responses suggest similar differences between groups: the enjoyment of girls in Years 8 and 9 undergoes a steady decline, while there is a dramatic reversal of feeling amongst those girls in Year 10; in response to the first questionnaire 15.4% claimed to enjoy being in the group, compared with 45.5% in response to the second.

FIGURE XVII

“Do you/Did you like being in an all-boys group?”:

A comparison of boys’ responses in the autumn term, 1997 and at the end of the
summer term, 1998

YEAR 8 (n = 23)

	YES	IT’S/IT WAS OK	NO
OCTOBER 1997	56.5%	43.5%	0%
JULY 1998	66.7%	33.3%	0%

YEAR 9 (n = 19)

	YES	IT’S/IT WAS OK	NO
OCTOBER 1997	31.6%	68.4%	0%
JULY 1998	22.2%	55.6%	22.2%

YEAR 10 (n = 25)

	YES	IT’S/IT WAS OK	NO
OCTOBER 1997	4%	80%	16%
JULY 1998	14.3%	71.4%	14.3%

Figure XVIII illustrates boys' views on whether they are working harder in single-sex groups. While single-sex setting appears to have a beneficial effect on the working habits of Year 8 boys, Year 9 and 10 boys appear increasingly convinced that it is not conducive to hard work. This negative attitude is particularly evident in the case of the Year 9 boys. The figures invite an interesting comparison: after one year of being taught in a single-sex group, none of the Year 9 boys claims to be working harder, while none of the Year 8 boys claims *not* to be working harder. The girls' responses to the previous question are reflected here; only the Year 10 girls perceive that they are working significantly harder by the end of the year.

A steady escalation of demotivation and underachievement amongst the Year 9 boys was observed both in class and in interviews. The lack of any group cohesion seemed to become increasingly marked and, as the boys themselves noted in interviews, there were frequent arguments between splinter groups. Two pupils noted by the researcher at the beginning of the year as seemingly bright and well-motivated appeared to suffer the adverse effects of this negative environment and began overtly misbehaving, one seemingly in order to divest himself of his studious image and secure his membership of the most disruptive group of boys, and the other to vent his frustration and gain the teacher's attention. The disillusionment of this second boy was clearly articulated in interviews, and the decline in his performance seen in his test results. Like many others, however, he did not attribute his dissatisfaction primarily to the group, but to the teacher. In a second interview only one of the four Year 9 boys claimed to prefer an all-boys group while the other three maintained their initial view that no major differences were perceptible, but that lessons were "boring". The positive

FIGURE XVIII

“Do you think that you are working harder/have worked harder in an all-boys group?”:
A comparison of boys’ responses in the autumn term, 1997 and at the end of the
summer term, 1998

YEAR 8 (n = 23)

	YES	NOT SURE	NO
OCTOBER 1997	60.9%	34.8%	4.3%
JULY 1998	66.7%	33.3%	0%

YEAR 9 (n = 19)

	YES	NOT SURE	NO
OCTOBER 1997	42.1%	36.8%	21%
JULY 1998	0%	50%	50%

YEAR 10 (n = 25)

	YES	NOT SURE	NO
OCTOBER 1997	36%	48%	16%
JULY 1998	14.3%	52.4%	33.3%

views of the only advocate of the group should, however, be viewed in the context of his having been promoted to this higher-ability boys' group.

Developments in the attitudes of boys in Year 8 and 10 were, in contrast, generally seen to be positive. A small number of boys who were initially noted as apathetic and potentially disruptive clearly became more motivated and responsive, focusing their attention on what was being taught rather than on their furtive doodling. Unlike the Year 9 boys, the enthusiasm of both groups seemed to increase over the year, with boys participating readily and apparently without embarrassment. While potential confrontations arose more frequently amongst the Year 10 group, whose moods seemed to fluctuate more often than those of Year 8, they were quickly diffused by the teacher. Shouted interactions across the classroom, a common feature of the Year 9 boys' lessons, were seldom observed in these groups. In interviews, most of these boys perceived some advantages in single-sex teaching but did not think that the grouping had effected significant changes in their attitudes to the subject. Like the Year 9 boys, they regarded the teacher as the single most important variable in creating an effective learning environment.

6.3.4 The sex of the teacher in single-sex groups

Pupils of both sexes who are taught in single-sex groups appear more convinced than their peers in mixed groups of the benefits of being taught by a teacher of the same sex as themselves. There is a clear contrast in their responses to a statement in Pupil Questionnaire 3, "It's better to be taught by a teacher of the same sex as yourself." 21.3% of pupils in single-sex groups agree that it is better to have a teacher of the same sex, compared with only 7.1% in mixed groups. Similarly, in response to a further statement on Pupil Questionnaire 3, "It's better to have a male teacher teaching

an all-boys group”, boys in single-sex groups were more inclined to agree; 21.2% said ‘Yes’ compared with 14.5% of pupils in mixed groups.

A few boys in interviews recognised that it was an advantage to be taught by a male teacher in an all-boys group since he was more likely to be able to engage their interest than a female teacher:

Boy (Year 9, School D): “It is different with Mr. F because when we’ve finished our work we just read French comics, and they’re Mr. F’s, he brings them in. ...I don’t think Ms. T would bring in comics like Superheroes and that....”

Several girls also found that a female teacher was more able to relate to them. While the boys’ appreciation of a male teacher often tended to be based on common interests, the girls’ appreciation appeared to be more for the teacher’s ability to empathize with them:

Girl (Year 9, School C): “I think it’s better for the girls being taught by a female teacher ‘cos she understands you a bit more.”

Girl (Year 10, School A): “I think we prefer it with a woman teacher. She seems easy to relate to.”

Several boys in interviews described how female teachers experienced greater problems with discipline in all-boys groups than male teachers:

Boy (Year 9, School D): “[I think there’s a difference] ‘cos all the boys think, ‘Oh, she’s female and she won’t shout that much’. That’s why they’re naughty....”

Boy (Year 10, School A): “It would be better if we had a male teacher... because there isn’t really that much respect for the teacher. It’s hard for a female teacher to teach them.”

Such comments on the difficulties experienced by female teachers of boys' groups are reflected in teachers' own accounts in Chapter 7.

6.4 Pupils' attitudes to learning modern foreign languages in a single-sex group

6.4.1 Pupils' enjoyment of modern foreign languages in single-sex groups

Batters' finding (1988) that boys taught in single-sex groups may enjoy language learning more than their peers in mixed groups seems to be corroborated by questionnaire data in this study. Pupils' responses to the question "Do you enjoy learning French/German?" in Pupil Questionnaire 2 suggest that single-sex setting may increase all pupils' enjoyment but has a particularly positive effect on boys' attitudes. 34.3% of all pupils in single-sex groups answered 'Yes' compared with 30.3% of mixed pupils, and 32.5% of boys in single-sex groups responded positively compared with 26.4% of boys in mixed groups. Very little difference was observed in the responses of the girls: 35.6% of mixed-class girls and 34.2% of single-sex girls claimed to enjoy learning languages.

The responses of boys and girls who completed Pupil Questionnaire 4 lend further support to the theory that boys' enjoyment of the subject is increased considerably more by single-sex setting than girls'. The majority of boys, 53.3%, claimed that they had enjoyed learning languages more, while 21.7% said they had enjoyed it less. This contrasts sharply with the girls' responses which suggest that single-sex setting may even have had a detrimental effect on their enjoyment: 55.1% of girls said they had enjoyed French less, compared with only 24.6% who had enjoyed it more.

Analysis of Pupil Questionnaire 3 statement, "I enjoy learning French/German" similarly suggests that girls prefer learning languages in mixed groups; 35.8% of girls

in mixed groups responded positively, compared with 27.1% in single-sex groups. The effect on boys' positive responses is less marked, with less than 1% difference, although the number of outright negative responses suggests that boys' aversion to languages is less pronounced in single-sex groups: 23.9% of boys in single-sex groups, compared with 32.8% in mixed groups, claimed that they did not enjoy languages.

In interviews pupils' responses to this question varied widely even within groups. An analysis of responses to a question raised in Pupil Questionnaire 4, "Has it been more or less enjoyable than last year?", summarised in Figure XIX, illustrates the diversity of responses from group to group. From these figures it is apparent both that girls' preference, generally, is for mixed groups and that age seems to be a less significant variable in determining attitudes than other variables found in individual teaching groups. Some of these variables are discussed in the following section.

6.4.2 The importance of single-sex grouping in shaping pupils' attitudes to modern languages

It seems clear that single-sex setting is only one of many variables that may affect pupils' attitudes to modern languages. Pupils were usually unsure about its impact on their attitudes. When asked to rate its importance in Questionnaire 4, boys were much less sure of its effect than girls; the largest number, 40%, were unsure, while 38.3% considered it unimportant. Girls gave a more decided response which was equally divided between the two extremes of response: 34.7% said that it was important, and the same percentage that it was unimportant.

FIGURE XIX

“Has [learning French] been more or less enjoyable than last year?”
The responses of single-sex pupils involved in the second Research Phase
by year group and sex

BOYS (n = 60)

YEAR GROUP	MORE	NOT SURE	LESS	NO RESPONSE
8	76.2%	19%	4.8%	0%
9	22.2%	33.3%	44.4%	0.1%
10	57.1%	23.8%	19%	0.1%

GIRLS (n = 72)

YEAR GROUP	MORE	NOT SURE	LESS	NO RESPONSE
8	16%	28%	56%	0%
9	13.6%	13.6%	72.7%	0.1%
10	44.5%	19%	36.5%	0%

The difficulty faced in interviews by pupils trying to assess the impact of single-sex teaching was clear. Many pupils claimed to perceive no difference and often, when pupils noticed a change in their attitude to languages from year to year, they were unable to attribute it to any distinct feature. When encouraged to elaborate, however, they most often named the teacher and their teaching style as the most important affective variables. A number went on to concede that they were probably influenced by a combination of the teacher and grouping variables. In School D, which had also introduced ability setting alongside single-sex grouping, boys placed in higher ability groups also commented on the importance of being set by ability.

A number of pupils in a range of classes commented on the appropriateness of single-sex setting for a subject which incorporates inherent gender divides. They saw the single-sex grouping as an opportunity to avoid wasting time learning language associated with the opposite sex which, they thought, they would not need to employ:

(Girl, Year 7, School B, questionnaire): "Learning French in an all-girls group is a good idea because there are different ways of spelling between boys and girls and it would have taken a long time to write out everything twice."

(Boy, Year 9, School D, interview): "I think there's a need for [single-sex teaching] in French and German because you've got different words for feminine and masculine. The stuff that we're taught is mostly masculine.. ... We get told the feminine stuff and we put it down in our vocabulary book, but we don't use it."

While such comments are amusing in their naivety, they may also conceal a more serious message, namely how little pupils understand of the fundamental structures of language.

Single-sex pupils' comments on their enjoyment or dislike of the subject were most often related to the influence of the teacher, while the single-sex setting was usually seen as a secondary issue. Observation of the three all-boys groups seemed to underline the relationship between the teacher's management of the group, and their teaching style, and the attitudes of the pupils, an issue explored in more detail in the following chapter.

6.4.3 Pupils' responses to specific learning activities in single-sex groups

Much of the data discussed here is derived from observation, carried out during Research Phase 2, of three higher ability all-boys groups in Schools D and E.

6.4.3.1 Speaking in single-sex groups

Both boys and girls in interviews described feeling more confident about speaking in a single-sex group:

Boy (Year 9, School D): "You can express yourself better. You can talk more, say things you want to say."

Boy (Year 10, School E): "...when you're speaking....with all boys you can have a laugh. If you say something wrong everyone takes it as a joke, so no-one takes the mick out of you or anything."

Girls (Year 9, School D):

R: "...we talk more."

B: "There's no-one laughing at you."

L: “If the teacher asks you a question you don’t get embarrassed if you say the wrong answer.”

Spender makes the observation that girls talk more freely in single-sex classes (1989, p. 153), while Batters found that boys and girls in single-sex groups used the target language more often (1988, p. 240). Figure XX, however, based on a question from Pupil Questionnaire 3, shows that while boys taught in single-sex groups are slightly more likely to enjoy speaking, girls’ enjoyment seems to be reduced in a single-sex group. Responses to the question “It is embarrassing speaking French/German in class” reveal a remarkable parity between boys in mixed and single-sex groups: 18% of those in mixed groups, and 18% in single-sex groups claimed to feel embarrassed, and 46% and 45.6% respectively disagreed. Girls’ responses suggest that they may experience more embarrassment amongst same-sex peers: 25.4% of those in mixed groups claimed to feel embarrassed, compared with 31.7% of those in single-sex groups.

While most of the girls interviewed admitted feeling slightly more at ease in single-sex groups when speaking, a few commented on feeling embarrassed when speaking in front of a same-sex group:

Girl (Year 9, School C): “[I don’t like] speaking in French about what you like doing ‘cos you get a bit stuck and the teacher says you should understand, but sometimes it’s hard to.....it’s embarrassing.”

This comment suggests that it is the teacher’s handling of the pupil, rather than the group, which determines her attitude to speaking. The end of year interviews conducted with boys who had been observed during Research Phase 2 also indicated that their enjoyment of speaking was relative to their general confidence

FIGURE XX

“I enjoy speaking in French/German”
A comparison of boys by group

	n	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	NO RESPONSE
MIXED	190	27.1%	33.5%	39.4%	0%
SINGLE-SEX	187	30%	42.8%	27.2%	0%
MIXED + SINGLE-SEX	377	28.5%	38.0%	33.5%	0%

“I enjoy speaking in French/German”
A comparison of girls by group

	n	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	NO RESPONSE
MIXED	190	34.2%	42.1%	23.7%	0%
SINGLE-SEX	232	25.4%	49.1%	25.4%	0.1%
MIXED + SINGLE-SEX	422	29.4%	45.9%	24.6%	0.1%

levels; less forthcoming boys did not enjoy speaking as much as their more assertive peers. There is, then, a strong possibility that teaching style and pupil personality are more important variables in determining attitudes to speaking than the single-sex group. This does not explain why most of the pupils interviewed highlighted the increase in their confidence and enjoyment in single-sex groups, but the possibility of the halo effect and of teachers having selected less reserved pupils who could be relied upon to make a substantial contribution to an interview should not be discounted.

Figure XXI, showing responses to an item from Pupil Questionnaire 3, seems to lend further support to the theory that single-sex groups encourage boys, but not girls, to speak more in language lessons. Some explanation was offered by girls in interviews:

Year 8, School D:

N: "If it's written work you get a lot more done in the single-sex group."

S: "If it's speaking and that you get a lot more done in the mixed."

AB: "Why is that?"

N: "The boys are a lot more confident in speaking, I think."

G: "Because the girls always go, ' Oh, I don't know how to say it.' But the boys just say it."

N: "They just have a go and say it."

Several teachers described their all-girls groups as very reticent. Their response to this through their teaching style seems to have played an important part in determining girls' willingness to speak. The teacher at School C, mentioned above by one of her Year 9 girls, had previously taught in an all-boys school and felt frustrated

FIGURE XXI

“I speak a lot of French/German in the lessons”
A comparison of boys by group

	n	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	NO RESPONSE
MIXED	190	13.8%	52.4%	33.9%	0%
SINGLE-SEX	187	16%	54.1%	29.8%	0%
MIXED + SINGLE-SEX	377	14.9%	53.2%	31.9%	0%

“I speak a lot of French/German in the lessons”
A comparison of girls by group

	n	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	NO RESPONSE
MIXED	190	13.2	59.5%	27.4%	0%
SINGLE-SEX	232	11.4%	53.7%	34.9%	0%
MIXED + SINGLE-SEX	422	12.2%	56.3%	31.5%%	0%

by her female pupils' reticence. Her unwillingness to modify her teaching style to accommodate this was criticised by the Head of Department. In contrast, one of the teachers of an all-girls group in School D described how she had overcome the girls' reserve through incorporating more pair-work, initial discussions in English on language-related topics which interested them, and encouraging them to repeat new words loudly. This approach had, she reported, increased their confidence so that they soon contributed with few reservations.

The role played by the teacher in determining boys' confidence in speaking was also observed in class. While all of the Year 10 boys in School E, who were observed during Research Phase 2, seemed, over the year, to become more confident speakers of French, with even the most image-conscious and reserved contributing regularly to whole-class discussions and participating in pair-work, the Year 9 boys in School D seemed to develop inhibitions quite quickly. Several boys were heard refusing to say words in French because, they claimed, they could not pronounce them. The lack of opportunities given to the class to practise their spoken French no doubt fuelled this embarrassment. They were never seen involved in pair- or group-work in lessons which were clearly geared to maximise the teacher's control of the class. This observation seems to lend further credence to the hypothesis that individual teaching style is a more important variable in determining pupils' attitudes to speaking than the single-sex grouping.

6.4.3.2 Listening in a single-sex group

Batters found that boys learning languages in single-sex groups listened less than boys in mixed groups (1988, p. 240). Observation of the three higher-ability boys' groups in this study revealed varying patterns which seemed largely teacher-dependent.

The Year 9 boys were clearly the poorest listeners; the teacher found it increasingly difficult over the year to secure the attention of the whole class and resorted to setting writing tasks more and more often since they dispelled the restlessness generated by teacher-led speaking activities. The only occasion on which the use of a tape recorder was observed involved the boys following the recorded dialogue in their textbooks.

The ability of both Year 8 and Year 10 boys to listen to the teacher and to each other seemed to improve over the course of the year. The imposing demeanour of both teachers, described in more detail in Chapter 7, and the unpredictability of their movements and voices seemed to dominate the boys' attention, leaving little opportunity for them not to listen. The teacher of the Year 10 group set purposeful listening tasks, such as listening to a radio broadcast prior to groups preparing their own broadcasts which were then read out to the rest of the group. Listening tasks were frequently presented as a challenge - "This is probably the most difficult listening exercise you will have ever done"- and, when the task was particularly difficult, it was made clear that complaints would not be tolerated and that the boys should be pleased with understanding only part of the text.

The important role played by the teacher in determining boys' attitudes to listening was made clear in the observation period. Through their presentation of listening tasks and their management of the groups, the teachers of the boys in Years 8 and 10 seemed to create a positive, receptive learning atmosphere. A number of other teachers of boys' groups described the difficulty they encountered in getting boys to listen, a problem which is not, perhaps, surprising when one considers research findings on the differing interactional styles of boys and girls described in Chapter 1. There is also a possibility that the success of these two teachers could be attributed to their male sex, a point discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7.

6.4.3.3 Reading in a single-sex group

Observation of the three higher-ability all-boys groups revealed teachers' widely differing approaches to reading in the classroom. Reading in the Year 9 group was largely a passive activity, with boys spending large proportions of the lesson time, and on some occasions the entire lesson, completing worksheets and exercises from the text book. The teachers of the boys in Year 8 and 10 integrated reading into lessons which employed all four skills; reading tasks were often set after oral preparation or as preparation for written and role-play exercises. These teachers often set deadlines for the completion of the reading task and the Year 10 teacher in particular sometimes prepared material which was directly relevant to the boys' out of school interests. In one instance, the boys worked on a French text written by him on an overhead transparency which described a road accident in which one of the boys had been involved, and which had been much discussed in school during his absence. This teacher also often encouraged the boys' active involvement with reading materials; on this occasion, for instance, the boys were given one minute to remember as many of the facts as possible before feeding back.

The boys' lack of a logical, pre-formulated strategy to tackle reading exercises was often observed, particularly amongst the Year 9 boys. Conversation with them revealed that their approach to cloze texts, frequently completed in class, was largely based on unreasoned guesswork; often they even failed to obtain the meanings of words which surrounded the missing word or phrase. This nonchalant attitude was also observed amongst the Year 10 boys in lessons when they were working with a French software package. Their approach to the instructions and text, all of which were in French, was noted by the researcher at the time as "impatient enthusiasm"; they did not

halt at unfamiliar words to decipher them but continued regardless. Since their progression through the package was dependent on their understanding of these words, however, their meanings were gradually deduced from the context and graphics, a process which might even be seen as conducive to training reading skills in a foreign language. The Year 9 boys, dependent only on the textbook and considerably less motivated than the Year 10 boys by the use of IT, remained unable, or unwilling, to infer meanings from the context.

This unsatisfactory approach to reading may be attributed to boys' laziness or to their teachers' failure to refer them to resources where unknown vocabulary could be accessed. Only the teacher of the Year 8 group was observed explicitly advising boys to look back through their own exercise books for the meanings of unknown words. Both he and the Year 10 teacher also encouraged boys to use the target language posters displayed around the room to aid their understanding of texts. The benefits of using computer-generated texts were clearly underlined; the use of graphics and the boys' interaction with the text facilitated and enhanced reading, reducing the time needed to locate unknown vocabulary by conventional means, and boys were also observed effectively sharing their knowledge in pairs and groups.

6.4.3.4 Writing in a single-sex group

Teachers' comments sometimes suggested that boys may develop more positive attitudes to writing in single-sex groups. Teachers of all-boys groups who had deliberately targeted writing as an area of weakness for boys, and consequently allocated more time in class to written exercises, reported seeing boys becoming more confident writers and reducing the gap between their own and the girls' written test results. A comparison of boys' own responses to "writing" in Pupil Questionnaire 3 by

group, however, reveals barely any difference in their perceptions: - enjoyment was registered by 26.1% in mixed groups and 24.6% in single-sex groups.

Of the three higher-ability all-boys groups 26.7% claimed to enjoy writing, compared with 34.7% of the girls, while only 15% registered their dislike. The boys in these groups were somewhat more positive than their female counterparts in their responses to writing activities which did not have a tangible outcome; 38.3% of boys, compared with 27.8% of girls, claimed to enjoy writing a description of themselves and 20% of boys, compared with only 9.7% of girls, enjoyed “writing answers to questions about a letter”. The percentage of boys disliking these activities was also slightly lower than that of the girls. The three higher-ability all-boys groups were clearly characterised by attitudes to writing which were more positive than might usually be observed in mixed groups.

There was some evidence of highly positive attitudes and excellent written output in the Year 10 boys’ group in School E. A number of boys identified a piece of coursework describing a football match as an activity they had particularly enjoyed. This work, produced around the time of the World Cup, was also identified by the teacher as particularly successful. He claimed to be especially pleased with the length of the work produced by the boys which, in many cases, exceeded the word limit stipulated by the exam board. Some excellent examples of posters, comprising well-written French text, were also observed by the researcher.

The initially positive attitude to writing of the Year 9 boys in School D seemed to decline over the year. In the first interview one of the most disruptive boys in the group selected writing as his favourite activity. Both he and his classmates were visibly motivated by writing in class which seemed to have a calming effect on them, perhaps because it conformed to the boys’ expectations of classwork, derived from other

subjects, or involved little effort on their part since it was principally copying. As discipline in the class deteriorated, the teacher employed an increasing number of written tasks to maintain control, most of which seemed to involve transferring information rather than independent production of the language. In the second interview, when all of the boys were less positive about the class, writing was dismissed by the same boy as “boring”.

The Year 8 boys’ occasional protests about writing were quickly suppressed by their teacher who motivated them with merits and reassurances of their competence. Both he and the Year 10 teacher set deadlines for the completion of writing tasks in class.

6.5 Conclusions

While pupils are generally averse to the initial idea of single-sex teaching, this aversion tends to diminish as soon as learning commences in these groups. The greatest differences in attitudes to single-sex grouping do not appear in boy/girl comparisons, but in comparisons between individual groups. Ability setting, age and the teacher all seem to be important determinants of attitude: the most positive attitudes amongst boys were expressed by younger boys of higher ability who were being taught by a male teacher or by a female who had matched her teaching methods to the needs and interests of the group. Such effective teaching methods are described in more detail in the next chapter.

Boys and girls often refer to feeling more confident in single-sex groups. Pupils of both sexes are likely to respond more positively than their peers in mixed groups to being taught by a teacher of the same sex as themselves. Girls frequently criticise boys’ behaviour in mixed groups and describe the increased support they have found in the

new group. There is a general tendency to recognise that while the group may not be as enjoyable, it may encourage pupils to work harder; large numbers of pupils based their objections to single-sex setting on their realisation that they were deprived of the opportunity to socialise with the opposite sex.

A single-sex setting was not rated by pupils as particularly important, and did not seem to have any significant effect on pupils' learning preferences, although some of the responses of the all-boys groups suggest that the setting may produce increased enjoyment, as shown in their more positive responses, at least initially, to writing. Pupils were more likely to name the teacher and their teaching style as the most important influences on their attitudes to the subject. Observation of all-boys groups suggested that teachers' class management also plays an important role in creating an environment which is conducive to work.

In general, pupils do not relate the creation of an effective learning environment, which facilitates and encourages communication, merely to a single-sex setting. In the majority of cases it is regarded as far less important than other variables, most notably the teacher. The following pupils' words echo many others' thoughts:

(Boys, Year 10, School E, interview)

A: "Do you think it's important being in an all-boys group?"

C: "No, I don't think it is."

S: "It's not really important. It's just the same as in other groups."

C: "It's the teacher that's most important. He's got to make the lessons enjoyable, or you just lose interest. That's what happened last year."

Chapter 7

Teachers' perceptions of pupils' attitudes and performance

7. Introduction

This chapter considers the perceptions of teachers employed in the five case study schools, including both those who were responsible for teaching single-sex groups and their colleagues in the same departments who were not. Views were collected principally by means of interviews and questionnaires; observational data is used to support and contextualise the findings where appropriate. All teachers of single-sex groups and, with one exception, each Head of Department, were interviewed at least once. Where possible, other members of staff were interviewed twice, once towards the beginning of the school year and again towards the end. 'On the wing' informal discussion, and teachers' contributions at workshops and in departmental meetings, were also taken into account.

The Teacher Questionnaire described in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4, and reproduced in the appendix, was administered to all members of each case study school's modern languages department in summer, 1997. It was issued the following year to the three teachers of the boys' groups under observation, and to their colleagues who had not already received a copy. In total 25 teachers responded. The questionnaire uses a five-point attitudinal scale to record responses to 40 statements relating both to pupils' attitudes and performance in foreign languages, and to setting arrangements. Teachers were asked which, if any, single-sex groups they were teaching, or had taught in the previous year, and whether they had any previous experience of teaching single-sex classes. They were instructed to base their responses only on the year group(s)

involved in the initiative. The concluding section invited them to add their own comments on any aspect of language teaching or the single-sex initiative.

This chapter begins by describing the teaching staff and the composition of each modern languages department, in terms of the teachers' sex and teaching experience. It also sketches the researcher's impressions of each department's general approach to teaching.

The second section discusses teachers' perceptions of pupils' performance in foreign languages: their learning behaviours and attitudes. It focuses first on general work-related skills, and then turns to more specific language learning related skills and tasks. Comparisons are drawn between the perceived behaviours of pupils in single-sex groups and those in mixed groups, and between pupils' and teachers' perceptions.

The third part (Sections 6.4 and 6.5) focuses more specifically on the perceived effects of single-sex teaching. It first analyses teachers' understanding of pupils' performance in single-sex groups before considering a number of variables which may also influence their achievement: mixed ability grouping; class size; the sex of the teacher; the teaching style, and the relationship with the teacher.

Finally, the chapter presents teachers' evaluations of the relative merits and drawbacks of single-sex teaching.

7.1 The teaching staff

Of the 25 teachers who responded to the questionnaire 21 were female and four were male. One of the male teachers was Head of Department at School E, where there was another male member of staff, and the other two were both employed in School D.

There was a wide range of teaching experience amongst respondents, from one year to 31 years. Eight teachers had some previous experience of teaching in a single-

sex school, although this was quite limited in most cases, and referred largely to work in girls' grammar schools.

Eighteen teachers who completed the questionnaire were responsible at that time for one, or more, single-sex group. The following sections summarise the central features of each department.

7.1.1 School A

At the time of the research there were five females and one male in the department with teaching experience ranging from two to 25 years. The female Head of Department had been in post for four years. She demonstrated considerable enthusiasm and her dynamic approach to teaching French was the subject of an article that appeared in the TES in 1995. She was also regularly invited to speak at conferences and sometimes organised extra revision and speaking sessions for pupils at her home in the holidays. Other members of the department appeared equally creative in their teaching methods.

7.1.2 School B

In 1996-7, the year of the school's involvement in the research, the department comprised five females, one of whom was the Head of Department, and one male who did not teach a full timetable in the Department as he was also a Senior Teacher. There was a range of teaching experience in the Department; three staff had less than five years' experience, and three had over twenty years'. With the exception of one teacher who was in her first year all staff had worked at the school for a considerable number of years.

The staff appeared committed and enthusiastic and led by a Head of Department who demonstrated exceptional assiduousness and willingness to try out innovative approaches to teaching. Ofsted commended them on the following grounds:

“The quality of teaching was sound or better in eight out of ten lessons seen. Lessons are well-planned, and incorporate a broad range of equipment including effective use of audio-visual aids.”

(Ofsted Inspection Report, 1994)

7.1.3 School C

At the time of the research all four members of the department were female and over 45. All had been teaching for at least twenty years and, with the exception of one teacher who had only been in post for two years, had been working at the school for at least a decade.

The Head of Department appeared highly committed to teaching, and to her subject, and particularly enjoyed teaching her boys' group. Attractive and frequently-renewed display work in the corridors and classrooms suggested similar commitment from other members of the department who seemed to work closely together. The new teacher, however, who was responsible for teaching the girls' group, did not appear fully integrated into the department. The Head of Department commented on this teacher's dislike for the girls' group and quoted her as saying that the group was 'dull'.

The department appeared forward-thinking in their approach to teaching, and extensive use of the target language was observed in class, a feature praised by Ofsted in their report on the school.

7.1.4 School D

The department has a history of instability. In 1996-7, the first year of the school's involvement in the research, the Head of Department was replaced by a female teacher who had one year's teaching experience and one member of the department resigned in April and was replaced by a temporary female supply teacher. One male newly-qualified teacher joined the department in September 1996 and there were two part-time female teachers who had been at the school for more than 10 years.

In September 1997 the male teacher replaced the previous Head of Department and three newly-qualified teachers were appointed, two females, one of whom was part-time, and one male.

Both Heads of Department, notwithstanding their youth and lack of experience, appeared to be strong, effective leaders who were highly committed and initiated several innovations such as the single-sex setting and trips abroad. While the younger, newly-qualified teachers seemed reasonably committed to new teaching methods, the two older part-time teachers practised more traditional approaches. Unsurprisingly, there was often a sense of impermanence in the department which was sometimes expressed as frustration.

7.1.5 School E

At the time of the research the department had two male teachers, one of whom was the Head of Department, five female teachers and two female support teachers employed part-time. There was a full range of teaching experience; the Head of Department who was teaching the boys' group had been teaching for fifteen years, and

had been in post for eight years, while the teacher of the girls' group was newly-qualified.

Department members clearly enjoyed excellent relationships and offered considerable mutual support. A creative, energetic approach to teaching was in evidence and teachers produced many high-quality home-made materials. Teachers seemed to work very hard on maintaining close, "constructive" (Ofsted report, 1996) relationships with pupils.

7.2 Teachers' perceptions of pupils' learning behaviours

7.2.1 Teachers' perceptions of boys' and girls' differential learning styles

Teachers' recognition that boys and girls may apply differential learning styles to modern languages has been documented in a number of other studies (see, for instance, Clark, 1995, p. 319; Swan, 1998, p. 170). The teachers surveyed in this study unequivocally accepted the questionnaire suggestion that "Boys and girls have different learning styles"; nine agreed strongly, twelve agreed, four were unsure and no-one disagreed. It could be argued that this largely unambivalent response was informed by these teachers' experience of teaching single-sex groups, and by their desire to see the initiative succeed. It should be remembered, however, that seven of the teachers who completed the questionnaire were not teaching any single-sex groups, although it must be conceded that their attitudes may have been positively influenced by working in a department which was actively expressing its conviction in the potential benefits of single-sex setting.

It is of interest that, of the four teachers who responded with 'Neither agree nor disagree', one was teaching only mixed groups, and had no experience of single-sex teaching, one was a supply teacher who had taught both boys' and girls' groups

occasionally, and two were teachers of higher ability all-girls groups in Years 8 and 10. The inclusion of two girls' groups' teachers in this category may suggest that current teaching styles in modern languages are inherently more girl-friendly, explaining why neither of the two perceived the need to modify their approach to meet the needs and interests of the group. It should also be pointed out, however, that both teachers experienced some considerable difficulty with their groups. In the case of the latter teacher, who was an NQT with only limited teaching experience, these difficulties were alleviated over the course of the year as her relationship with the group developed. The teacher of the Year 8-9 girls' group, however, unlike her predecessor, complained bitterly of the passive nature of her girls' group and their 'lack of intelligence', which plagued their relationship throughout. Although these individual cases cannot be seen as representative, it might be inferred from them that the ability and willingness of the teacher to tailor their teaching style to meet individual groups' requirements is central to the success of any such initiative, a theme which will be discussed in greater depth in Section 7.4.

7.2.2. Perceptions of work-related skills and behaviours

7.2.2.1 Application to work

Most teachers were divided in their reactions to the questionnaire statement, "Boys lack the application needed for language learning" although the majority were in disagreement: twelve of the 25 disagreed, one of them strongly, five were unsure and eight agreed. Of the fifteen teachers of all-boys groups, around half, eight, expressed their disagreement, one of them strongly, while four agreed. Teachers of mixed groups were slightly more likely to agree with the statement: 32% agreed, compared with 27% of boys' teachers, although the limited size of the sample must be taken into account.

In interviews some teachers contrasted the diligence of girls' groups with easily distracted classes of boys:

(School B, Year 7 boys' group): ".....it's getting them through the tasks set that I've planned for the lesson which proves to be very difficult. The girls lap up whatever you give them."

Such comments were most often made by teachers of mixed or lower ability classes, but even those teachers who professed to be quite happy with their boys' groups often described the challenge of stimulating boys who forcefully express an aversion to work when it does not comply with their own agenda of interests:

(School D, Year 9 boys' group): "I think you can't impose things on boys. It has to be something they're interested in."

(School A, Year 10 boys' group): "As soon as one of them said, 'Oh, Miss, do we have to work today?' you knew you were onto a loser and you'd have to work very hard and find some way of disguising what you were doing - 'No, this isn't work. OK, we won't do any work today. Tell you what we'll do instead...' "

When teachers were able to key into boys' interests, however, they often found that the class was prepared to work extremely hard, producing unprecedented results:

(School E, Year 10 boys' group): "At the top end there's been some exceptional work from individuals, and I'm not sure if that would have come out in a mixed group.....the boys going off and getting their heads down and creating an enthusiasm. The World Cup thing....the fact that some of them wrote about three sides of A4 on a match report, or six to seven sides in an exercise book, that was just mind-blowing. It might not have been 100% accurate, but it was reasonably communicatively sound."

The teacher of the Year 8 boys in School C similarly found that:

“The ethos of the group is a working group...”

It should be remembered that these latter two groups were both, nominally, higher ability groups, although each nevertheless comprised a broad range of ability, and, in the case of the Year 10 boys, contained a number who had been promoted from lower sets when the single-sex sets were established. The importance of ability setting is considered along with other external variables in determining the effectiveness of single-sex setting in Section 7.4.

7.2.2.2 Organisational skills

Asked in interviews if they had noticed any differences between boys' and girls' groups, many teachers cited boys' poor organisational skills:

(School B, Year 7 & Year 8 boys' groups): “The basic one is that the girls are much more organised. The boys spend a lot of time organising themselves, sorting themselves out, which gives you less teaching time with the boys.”

(School B, Year 7 boys' group): “The thing that's mostly struck me is the boys' organisational skills... Things like not having their pens, pencils, books, not remembering homework.”

A number of teachers felt that boys needed to be given a clear structure to lessons to enable them to proceed through tasks and complete homework. A teacher of a Year 7 boys' group described having to prepare boys for their homework by working through many more examples in class than with the girls, while a Year 9 lower ability boys' teacher adopted the practice of displaying on the board a list of tasks to be completed that lesson, and asking pupils at the end how many they had finished.

For the teacher of the Year 9 boys' group in School D, which was the subject of observation, greater structure was provided by grammar classes and didactic teaching methods:

A: "What do you feel the boys have done well this year? What has gone down well with them?"

Ms. C: "I think when my lessons have been more structured, and they know precisely what they're doing, even though they complain that it might be taking a lot of information in from the board. At least they're focused. So, for example, when I've done the perfect tense with them, that's been quite good because it's been quite structured..."

Like this teacher, others felt that structured lessons like this, which centred on writing rather than interaction, were the only option with boys' groups who were both disorganised and lacking in the behavioural and social skills described in the next section.

Some teachers, however, used the opportunity of teaching an all-boys group to take remedial action and train boys in organisational skills. This was achieved largely through the consistent implementation of groundrules which were heavily stressed at the beginning of the year and, in one case, displayed at the front of the room. In the most effective example of how the organisational skills of a lower ability boys' class could be improved, one Year 9 boys' teacher in School D introduced the concept of equipment and behaviour managers. Both were elected on a half-termly basis and, she related, the election process was taken very seriously and served in itself as a lesson in self-control and organisation. The boys responded extremely positively to having their desks inspected for the requisite pen, pencil and ruler at the beginning of the lesson by

the equipment manager who knew that a letter of commendation would be sent home to parents if he managed his responsibility well.

Although she had not resorted to such obvious disciplinary measures, the teacher of the Year 10-11 boys in School A was similarly surprised by the organisational skills demonstrated by boys at the end of their school career, when they were required to return school materials:

“Before we’ve had terrible absenteeism, and problems with tracking down tapes and things, but they did it without a murmur. They all did the tasks - in the past we’ve had parents in to say, ‘We haven’t got the tape in...’”

While the age of pupils might be seen to play a part in their ability to organise themselves, such accounts serve to illustrate how boys’ organisational skills may be targeted and improved in a single-sex group.

7.2.2 3 Discipline

Teachers who recognised that their boys’ groups were not effective sites of learning attributed this primarily to disciplinary problems within the group. Boys’ ability to control their behaviour was felt, in some cases, to have deteriorated in all-boys groups, even when the boys were well-motivated:

(School D, Year 9): “The behaviour of my bottom set boys is very poor. It’s just a case of trying to instil basic classroom behaviour, which is just a matter of repeating it at the start of every single lesson. Work-wise they’re quite keen, and want to succeed, but behaviourally it’s not good. It’s very tiring and they’re very demanding.”

(School B, Year 7): “Two of the boys in there are real problem children. They have no self-control whatsoever. And instead of the other boys in

the class taking a sensible attitude and thinking, 'Leave those, they're being....', they like to join in and sort of jump on the bandwagon as it were, and start messing around with them."

Almost all the teachers of boys' groups who were interviewed referred to being aware of the potential behavioural problems posed by such a group when they took them on. As the teacher-pupil relationship developed, these problems were either largely reduced, or else accentuated. Unlike the girls' groups, where isolated problems seemed to be caused by individuals, the behaviour of boys' classes as a unitary whole either improved dramatically or deteriorated significantly. Like colleagues in other schools (see, for instance, Swan, 1998, p. 167) the overwhelming majority of the staff in this survey spoke enthusiastically of the pleasures of teaching 'sensible', 'organised', 'self-controlled' and 'enthusiastic' all-girls groups in which misbehaviour was rarely an issue:

(School B, Year 7, mixed ability): "They don't misbehave, they don't disrupt, they just get on with what they've got to do."

While most boys' teachers did not claim to have seen a complete eradication of behavioural problems, a considerable number found by the end of the year that pupils' behaviour had improved to a large degree, in one case to the extent that an earlier "diarrhoea group" who displayed serious behavioural problems (*School D, Year 9, lower ability*) had become the teacher's favourite class. This contrasts sharply with the experiences of a teacher of another Year 9 boys' group, of higher ability and in the same school, who related:

"I find that I'm shouting at them more, putting them in more detentions, purely because their behaviour has gone downhill..."

Observation of the three all-boys groups confirmed that these boys' behaviour had declined sharply throughout the year, presenting a clear contrast both with the Year 8 boys' group in the same school, and more particularly with the Year 10 boys' group, which contained a number of pupils who had previously caused considerable problems in modern languages. Some of those variables which may contribute to this differential development of boys' behaviour in single-sex groups are considered in Section 7.4.2.3.

7.2.2.4 Social skills

For some teachers, an all-boys group provided an opportunity to target boys' deficient social skills. They set about doing this through greater use of carefully-controlled pair- and group-work and through rewarding and praising boys for gestures of co-operation and support: lending out equipment; not mocking others' pronunciation, and generally offering assistance to their peers.

While, in some cases, boys became more co-operative and socially aware, in others, relationships deteriorated and classes seemingly fragmented into splinter groups. Analysis of teachers' responses to the questionnaire statements, "Boys may work well in small groups and pairs in single-sex groups" and "Boys work well in small groups and pairs in mixed classes" suggests that teachers of boys' groups perceive that boys work better together in single-sex groups. The fifteen teachers of boys' groups were less likely to disagree with the statement when it related to boys' group than they, and their colleagues, were in response to the same statement about mixed groups; eight disagreed with the latter, while only one disagreed with the former. Responses to the same statements with regard to girls reflects teachers' conviction that girls' social skills are far superior to boys' in both mixed and single-sex groups; no disagreement was registered in response to either statement.

Groups in which there seemed to be a high level of co-operation amongst boys were often characterised by a team identity, often mentioned by their teachers in interviews and frequently endorsed by them in class. For instance, the 'behaviour manager' in a Year 9 group in School D was responsible for issuing yellow and red cards to individuals in the team who failed to raise their hands before contributing to whole-class discussions, while the male teacher of the Year 9 boys observed in the same school the following year described the beginning of the year in the following way:

"I said, 'Look, lads, we are a team. We work as a team in this school. It's not teacher-student. If you fail, I fail.'"

His frequent use of the term 'lads' in addressing the class seemed to reinforce further this team identity.

The teacher of the Year 8-9 boys in School C appeared to have an equally close relationship with her boys' class, whose social skills she praised after they had been brought to her attention on a school exchange trip:

"There was a terrific sense of the whole group looking after each other.

They are very caring, and very patient with the weak members."

She went on to attribute the development of these skills to the single-sex grouping:

AB: "Were they like that originally?"

Ms. H: "No, that's developed."

AB: "Do you think that would have happened in a mixed group?"

Ms. H: "I don't honestly think so because they tend to want to show how macho they are in front of the girls. And the strong ones, the good ones, want to do the peacock display. If you can put somebody else down you can throw yourself into a good light, can't you? What's the point in here?"

We're all lads - we've all been in the showers!"

Two of the three boys' groups observed, in Years 8 and 10, also seemed to progress in terms of their social skills in the course of the year; these two groups also seemed to enjoy an increasingly good relationship with their teacher. The Year 9 group, however, became increasingly divided into sub-groups amongst which there was very little interaction. Exchanges between them often involved some verbal or minor physical abuse. A similar development was noted by a teacher of a lower ability Year 9 boys' group in the same school the previous year:

"They've split up into two groups, and there's quite a lot of aggressive behaviour between them... There have been moments where I've thought, 'I'm not going to be able to stop this kid from kicking the hell out of this other kid'."

She also described how a brighter boy in the group, who began by offering assistance to a weaker member of the group, soon began intentionally to misinform him.

Stories of the kind described here would suggest that unless the issue of social skills is openly addressed by teachers who enforce strict egalitarian principles in their classroom, boys' interactive skills, in the absence of mediating, exemplary girls, are likely to degenerate.

7.2.3 Perceptions of specific skills and tasks

7.2.3.1 Speaking

The questionnaire suggestion that "Boys find speaking in the target language in a mixed class embarrassing" attracted a mixed response from teachers, with each category represented. seven teachers were unsure, seven agreed and eight disagreed.

There was, however, much stronger support from the boys' teachers for the theory that "Boys are more willing to speak in the target language in an all-boys group": four agreed strongly, four agreed, four were uncertain and three disagreed. Other schools implementing single-sex initiatives for modern languages have reported an increase in boys' confidence when speaking (see, for instance, Dore, 1995), but these questionnaire results and interview comments suggest that boys' contributions are largely dependent on the particular environment. They may also reflect the difficulty in comparing a mixed group with a single-sex group which brings together, for the first time, a new collection of characters. Only one teacher described basing her evaluations of boys' contributions in French lessons on comparisons with their performance in other lessons:

(School A, Year 10): "In the single-sex group I had boys who were outstanding at contributing, and I did ask other teachers what they were like in mixed lessons because I was fascinated by them, like B. Apparently, in other lessons B was a bit of a talker, but didn't really contribute. In French he was a leader, he had an identity... And I can't think of boys in mixed groups who were like that."

Most teachers would probably agree that boys, on the whole, are not especially embarrassed by speaking in the mixed classroom and that it is much easier to perceive girls, who are often silenced in mixed groups, contributing more in the single-sex class, an issue discussed in Section 7.4. Conclusions on whether pupils speak more target language in single-sex classes could be drawn by employing systematic observation instruments under controlled conditions, an option which was rejected on the grounds that it may have limited unduly the range of phenomena being observed.

7.2.3.1.1 Role-plays

The teachers' views on boys' attitudes to role-playing in languages seem to echo boys' self-professed enjoyment, described in Chapter 4. None of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire agreed with the statement, "Boys do not enjoy role-plays in language lessons", and of the fifteen teachers of all-boys groups only two were unsure, the rest choosing to disagree, six of them strongly.

7.2.3.2 Listening

The teachers' responses to boys' attitudes to specific skills and tasks broadly mirrored the pupils' responses, although the diversity of their experiences with vastly differing groups was sometimes reflected in a broad range of responses. Questionnaire responses to the statement, "Boys find listening more difficult than girls" exemplifies this diversity, with every possible response represented and most clustered almost equally around agree (eight) and disagree (nine). Teachers' comments on boys' listening skills in interviews frequently referred not to their performance in listening tasks but to their inability to listen to and act upon the teacher's instructions. This was often seen by teachers' of boys' groups as a significant obstacle:

(School B, Year 7 mixed ability boys' teacher): ".....you can tell them till you're blue in the face what you want them to do. I perhaps shouldn't say this, but I have to speak to them a lot more in English than I do to the girls, because it doesn't go in if you speak to them in French. They're not listening really. They switch off."

(School D, Year 9 lower ability boys' teacher): "They never listen. They have to have every instruction repeated individually....they want it really clarified. They seem unable to think for themselves about how to present

their work, or what is actually being asked of them. It has to be spelt out...”

As this last teacher’s comments imply, boys’ difficulties in listening, which are perhaps more apparent amongst lower and mixed ability groups, seem to suggest a much broader range of problems surrounding their entire approach to a subject which is perceived as making excessive demands on their concentration, aural and social skills.

7.2.3.3 Reading; the use of textbooks

The greatest number of teachers, eleven, were unable either to agree or disagree with the questionnaire statement, “Boys do not like using textbooks”, while the second largest number, nine, disagreed and the remaining five were fairly equally distributed across the range of responses. When textbooks were mentioned in interviews it was commonly on the grounds of their inappropriateness; both the girls’ teacher at School C and the lower ability boys’ teacher at School D cited the textbooks they were obliged to use as an important reason why the grouping was less than effective. When the latter teacher selected a new coursebook, it corresponded more closely to the boys’ interests:

“...we moved to [a new textbook] which is a cartoon-orientated course, and that was a lot more successful. It has very clear instructions, in the target language and in English. You start at page one and work through. Lots of cartoon characters, lots of football games...”

7.2.3.4 Writing

Responses to the questionnaire statement, “Boys do not enjoy writing” were almost equally distributed, with nine teachers agreeing, eight unsure and eight disagreeing. Within this number, the fifteen teachers of boys’ groups were less ambivalent, with only three unsure and equal numbers, six in each category, agreeing

and disagreeing. This tendency of boys' teachers to have more pronounced views on what motivates or demotivates their male pupils was also observed in their responses to the questionnaire statements on listening and textbooks described above; compared with their colleagues teaching mixed groups, the proportion of boys' teachers who 'neither agree nor disagree' is much lower. This suggests, perhaps, that single-sex groups may help to focus teachers' attention more closely on the common features of individual groups, a point which is discussed further later in this chapter.

In interviews, teachers' comments on boys' writing often focused on accuracy and presentation. 26 teachers in Batters' survey of 36 agreed with her questionnaire statement, "Girls are more painstaking than boys with their written work" (Batters, 1988, p. 205). In the current study several referred to boys' less than meticulous approach:

(School B, Year 7 boys' group): " [The girls' work] is neater, better set out.

They tend to be able to copy the words better from the board; the lads make a lot of mistakes. They just scribble it down..."

When teachers of boys' groups deliberately focused the class's attention on improving their writing skills, and allocated extra time to writing practice, they claimed to see an improvement not only in boys' test marks, but also in their enjoyment of writing. Classroom observation of one Year 9 lower ability boys' group in School D revealed that the teacher's efforts to make boys aware of the presentation of their books had clearly paid off, with boys taking considerable pride in the written work in them.

7.3 Teachers' perceptions of pupils' attitudes to foreign languages

7.3.1 Pupils' enjoyment of foreign languages

Girls' greater preference for languages, discussed in Section 5.2 of Chapter 5, seems generally to be recognised by their teachers, although the diversity of responses might, as in the case of the pupils, be seen to reflect the importance of variables peculiar to individual classrooms in determining enjoyment. Ten teachers agreed with the statement, "Girls enjoy languages more than boys", one of them strongly, while nine disagreed and six were uncertain. The opinions of the teachers of all-boys groups were equally divided, with six agreeing and six disagreeing, although some teachers' accounts in interviews of boys' eager enthusiasm deserve to be mentioned. The teacher of the higher ability Year 8-9 boys' group in School C, quoted earlier in Section 7.2.2.1, related, for instance, how the boys would arrive in the classroom before the break that preceded their language lesson, and how enthusiasm pervaded the group, even when it was clear to some, at the end of Year 9, that they were not going to continue with German:

"The ethos of the group is a working group, turned on to languages, thinking, 'We are going to do well, we are doing well'. I have noticed a vast improvement in their attitude as opposed to other year groups. Generally, at the end of Year 9, they start to polarise.... The other thing that I've noticed, that I've never noticed before ever, is they're quite happy to carry on doing their German, even though they're not carrying on with it next year. There's none of this, 'Why are we doing this?'"

This unusual male enthusiasm for languages is, interestingly, reflected at the opposite extreme in the girls' group in the same school, of whom their teacher remarked:

"Most of them don't like languages."

Such a situation seems to stress the importance of taking into account the myriad of variables that accompanies any single-sex grouping in determining pupils' enjoyment of languages, some of which are discussed later in this chapter. It does appear, however, that teachers of single-sex groups are more likely to observe, like the boys' teacher in School C, a sudden improvement in pupils' attitudes. Teachers of girls' groups seem somewhat more aware of this improvement: out of a total of fourteen who were teaching girls' groups, ten agreed with the statement, "Girls taught in single-sex groups may have a more positive attitude to languages", three of them strongly. While the teachers of boys' groups showed a greater degree of uncertainty - five were unsure, compared with only one girls' teacher - the majority also concurred with the suggestion that boys' attitudes improve in single-sex groups. Out of a total of fifteen, seven agreed, three of them strongly, while three disagreed, one of them strongly.

This perception of pupils' more positive attitudes may, of course, be generated by teachers' desire to see improvements, a desire specifically referred to by two of the Heads of Department as the impetus for the initiative. For the male Head of Department at School E, an all-boys grouping presented an opportunity to challenge the particularly low esteem in which languages were held in the school:

"...about 50% of our children are from Asian backgrounds and, unfortunately, languages are not valued as much as, for example, science, maths and, to a lesser extent, technology. So in a way that had

to be challenged.....to get some of the Asian boys to see languages as not being something they do under duress, and as a girls' thing, but to feel that they can do languages in a male environment.....It's important for the status of the subject."

As this statement implies, one of the variables that may shape pupils' attitudes to modern languages may be the ethnic group to which they belong. The suggestion that some Asian boys' disinterest in languages may be countered by placing them in a male environment in which they feel more at ease, and where the image of the subject can be re-defined, is an interesting one. Research evidence has shown the role played by ethnicity, in conjunction with gender and social class, in determining pupils' performance (see Arnot et al, 1998, p. 69-72) and the issue, while outside the remit of the current study, is certainly worthy of further attention in the field of language teaching and learning.

Like the boys' teacher in School C, the Head of Department in School A noticed a rapid decline in boys' motivation in Year 9 which the single-sex grouping was intended to combat:

"....there was a huge amount of disaffection - 'Do I *really* have to do a foreign language?'"

As the same teacher describes, however, an improvement in attitudes may not be as obviously manifested by boys as by girls. Subjected to tremendous peer pressure not to appear diligent, the boys in her group refused to express their interest overtly, although the work they produced and their private interactions with the teacher and the researcher suggested genuine enthusiasm. The collective, she claimed, presented "a wall of discontent", a façade which, interviews suggested, seemed to conceal apparent

satisfaction. As her experience testifies, discerning boys' attitudes to learning languages may be much more difficult than discerning those of girls.

The questionnaire results suggest that teachers' assessment of pupils' preferences for different languages is generally an accurate reflection of pupil views. As discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.6.1, boys and girls often favour French more than other languages. Teachers do not perceive German as more boy-friendly; within the three schools teaching German, the majority of staff, eight out of seventeen, disagreed with the suggestion that "Boys prefer learning German to French or Spanish", and the second largest number, six, were unsure.

7.3.2 Perceptions of foreign languages as a girls' subject

A comparison of pupils' and teachers' perceptions of the supposed femininity of foreign language learning reveals a considerable disparity in thinking. The teachers in the survey do not, it seems, recognise the extent to which pupils claim to see languages as largely free of any genderized associations. Chapter 5 referred to the overwhelming number of pupils who claimed, through Pupil Questionnaire 3, to see languages as equally important for boys and girls - 95.2%. While none of the teachers agreed strongly with the questionnaire statement, "Languages are perceived to be more important by girls than boys", the pupils' unequivocal rejection of this idea is not reflected in the teachers' thinking: seven agreed, nine were unsure and nine disagreed. Teachers' responses to the suggestion that pupils may perceive languages to be more useful for girls appear, similarly, to present a stark contrast to pupils' responses. While only 13% of the 799 pupils who completed Pupil Questionnaire 3 agreed with this suggestion, ten of the 25 teachers, agreed that this was the case, one of them strongly, while seven were unsure and eight disagreed.

The survey results seem to lend some support to Batters' conclusion that teachers' assumptions that their pupils attribute a feminine image to languages do not reflect pupils' claims. Of Batters' 36 teacher respondents, fifteen disagreed with the statement, "Boys consider foreign languages to be a girls' subject", eleven were not sure and ten agreed (Batters, 1988, p. 197). Teachers' responses in the current survey resembled a little more closely the pupils' views: in response to the statement, "Boys consider language learning to be a feminine activity", eleven disagreed, two of these strongly, eleven were unsure and three agreed. This still represents, however, a striking contrast to the frequently observed tendency of pupils to dismiss this notion outright in interviews and questionnaires, as described in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1.

It should be remembered that the majority of teachers in the current survey had some experience of teaching single-sex groups, a variable, which, Batters suggests, may predispose them to seeing pupils' attitudes to languages as less gender-specific; in the one school in Batters' survey where a single-sex initiative was in place, over half the staff disagreed with this latter statement (*ibid.*). Questionnaire results obtained in the current survey suggest strongly that teachers agree on the effectiveness of single-sex groups in dismantling the image of foreign languages as more appropriate for females: only one teacher in the whole sample, including the teachers of mixed groups, disagreed with the statement, "Boys taught in single-sex groups may be less likely to see languages as a girls' subject", while five agreed strongly, nine agreed and nine were unsure.

7.4 Teachers' perceptions of pupils' performance

7.4.1 Evaluations of pupils' ability

The questionnaire included two statements which asked teachers to compare boys' and girls' competence in foreign languages: "Girls are better than boys at languages" and "There is no difference in boys' and girls' ability in languages". These elicited a wide range of responses although most, like the pupils', were weighted in favour of few differences between boys' and girls' ability. Thirteen of the 25 teachers disagreed with the first suggestion that girls' ability is superior to boys', while eight were unsure and four agreed. Of these latter four, three expressed strong agreement. Two of these were teachers' of boys' groups, and both were Heads of Department, one in School A and one in School B. The third teacher also worked in School A but had no experience of teaching single-sex groups. These three shared two common features: all possessed considerable teaching experience, in excess of fifteen years, and all taught in schools where mixed ability grouping was the predominant norm. This might, then, suggest both that teachers' awareness of the disparity increases in relation to their experience, and, more importantly, that the disparity is more noticeable, and possibly even accentuated, in mixed ability groups.

Given that four of the five schools involved in the research had launched the initiative primarily to raise boys' achievement, it would perhaps be reasonable to assume that most teaching staff would be sensitive to the differences in boys' and girls' proficiency. Those agreeing with the second suggestion that there was no difference, however, outnumbered those who disagreed: thirteen of the 25 teachers agreed, while nine disagreed and three were uncertain. This might be seen, of course, as a reflection of teachers' views on the effectiveness of single-sex groups, which ostensibly help to

reduce the imbalance in achievement, particularly as the questionnaire asked teachers to focus specifically on those year group(s) involved in the initiative; eight of those who agreed were teachers of boys' groups. It might also be indicative of teachers' greater understanding of the issue which locates the differences not in ability, but in attitude, and recognises that good behaviour may easily be confused with ability:

(School B, Head of Department): "Just because the girls are better behaved doesn't mean they're more able."

7.4.2 Teachers' perceptions of pupils' performance in single-sex groups

7.4.2.1 Girls' performance

The majority of teachers expressed a strong conviction that girls may benefit academically from being taught in a single-sex class: 21 agreed with the questionnaire statement, "Girls may learn languages better in single-sex groups", seven strongly. In interviews, those teachers who were responsible for both boys' and girls' groups were more likely to cite the unequivocal benefits for girls while expressing some reservations about the benefits for boys. The principal benefit for girls was perceived as their release from the overbearing influence of vociferous, dominant boys, the deciding factor in School C's initial decision to segregate. In an environment in which they were seen to "get swept along in the enthusiasm of the others" and to have "a fairer crack at the whip" (School B) most girls were seen to be thriving academically.

Girls' progress was often associated with their increased confidence. None of the teachers disagreed with the questionnaire suggestion that "Girls may be more confident in single-sex groups" and twenty agreed, eight of them strongly. This attributed new-found assertiveness was frequently mentioned in interviews:

(School D, Year 9): "The able girls have become very assertive. In speaking

they're not shy any more and there's almost a boy element of competing for the limelight. Most of them are considered by the rest of the staff to be shy, retiring violets."

(School E, Year 10): "Because the atmosphere's been more relaxed they have enjoyed more things like role plays, games where they could speak, because they're not really scared of anybody in the class."

(School B, Year 7/8): "I think they felt quite safe in their group. They were used to each other and there wasn't one of them that didn't want to speak. Whereas I notice in my mixed Year 7 class there are a few that you don't hear, who will not willingly put their hand up, and it's the same few who always put their hand up..."

The transition from reticence to assertiveness did not, however, generally occur as a matter of course. In the early stages of the initiative girls' teachers often described the difficulty they encountered in encouraging girls to speak out. In a number of cases individual 'boy substitutes' emerged who attempted to monopolise the teacher's attention and were readily accepted in this role by their peers who were accustomed to being 'swamped' (Ms. H, School B) by male classmates. When teachers deliberately applied strategies to counter this tendency, employing more pair- and group-work and encouraging them, in some cases, to view 'boyish' behaviours such as shouting as acceptable, girls' self-confidence seemed to flourish. Those teachers who did not appear to apply such measures found themselves frustrated by girls' passivity:

(School C, Year 9): "They're extremely quiet, they don't give anything back at all, very unreceptive.....They still don't like speaking out in class, you have to drag things out of them."

This teacher's attitude to the group, also mentioned in Section 6.3, may well have been influenced by her conviction, expressed in an interview, that boys were "a lot more fun". She was also the only teacher to disagree with the questionnaire suggestion that "Girls may learn languages better in single-sex groups". Seen in the context of the pupils' views, as described in Section 5.6.4.3, and the claim of one of her pupils that speaking in the class was embarrassing (Section 6.4.3.1), this case suggests that the improved performance of girls, and particularly their greater self-confidence, is not automatically guaranteed by the establishment of an all-girls group. It would appear to be largely dependent on the teacher's attitude to the group, which inevitably informs their ability to create both a non-threatening working environment and sound working relationships with the pupils.

7.4.2.2 Boys' performance

While teachers were generally less certain that single-sex groups benefited boys' learning of languages, there was still some considerable support for the suggestion that "Boys may learn languages better in single-sex groups": almost half, twelve of the 25 teachers, agreed, two of them strongly, while seven were unsure and five disagreed. It is of interest that three of the five who disagreed were teaching boys' groups in School B, where groups were also of mixed ability, a feature criticised by them in interviews and discussed in more depth in the following section.

Teachers' perceptions of the benefits derived by boys from the grouping were diverse, as the following comments indicate. These were made by teachers of boys' groups within the same school, School D, in response to the question of whether the single-sex grouping had been effective in terms of raising boys' achievement:

Ms. C, higher ability: "With that group, no. Purely because there are some

individuals in the group who are not capable of working by themselves, who need to have someone else in the group who will lead for them, almost. There are some quite strong characters who've made the group disruptive."

Ms. M, lower ability: "I don't know....My boys have probably achieved what they would have produced anyway. I don't feel it's improved what they have achieved."

Mr. R, higher ability: "Very much so. In terms of discipline and achievement I feel that they've learned a lot."

This diversity of teachers' experiences and opinions also seems to be reflected in their responses to the questionnaire item, "Single-sex groups may help to reduce the gap in boys' and girls' achievements in languages". Each response category was represented, although the weight of opinion is approving: fourteen teachers, over half, agreed, five of them strongly, eight were uncertain, and three disagreed, one of them strongly. In comparison with girls' groups, all-boys groups are, it seems, according to teachers, less likely to represent a clear-cut and short-term formula for improving pupil performance.

7.4.2.3 Other variables which are perceived to affect pupils' performance

7.4.2.3.1 Ability setting

For a number of teachers, ability grouping was perceived to play as important a role as single-sex setting in determining pupils' performance. Concerns that mixed ability setting was not conducive to language learning were voiced in two of the three schools with current or recent experience of teaching mixed ability groups: School B, where mixed ability setting was still practised, and School D, where setting both by ability and sex superseded the former practice of mixed ability, mixed sex groups. The

weight of general opinion derived from the questionnaire seems to support these teachers' doubts; seventeen of the 25 teachers surveyed agreed with the suggestion that "Mixed ability sets do not lend themselves to language teaching", nine of them strongly, while five were uncertain and three disagreed. In interviews, the teachers in School B expressed their apprehension about the inappropriateness of this kind of setting arrangement in a subject which is so unlike others:

Ms. K: "There are some pupils who have special needs who would really benefit from having the whole lesson geared towards them, but you can't do that when you've got a big group in the middle and a few at the top. In other subjects you can differentiate the task easier....with French at this level, it's so teacher-centred. You've got to aim just at the middle."

Ms. M: "Unless you have some specific grouping, some top sets, you cannot stretch the better able ones. I always feel very guilty that those who want to go on to 'A' level do not get the full grammatical input that they need."

The teachers in School D welcomed the opportunities for extension work afforded by their single-sex, ability streamed groups:

Mr. F: "I wouldn't dream of doing some of the grammar things I've done with the boys with other groups. Once we spent a lesson on grammar, which I hadn't planned to do. I'd expected it to last fifteen minutes maximum."

Most of the modern languages staff in this school were unable to decide which innovation - ability or single-sex setting - had been more influential in raising pupil achievement, and seemed to endorse the Head of Department's verdict which stated that:

"Doing both is more powerful than doing one or doing the other....."

One member of staff who had taught in the same school when it was a girls' grammar school ascribed greater importance, however, to setting by ability:

"I don't think the gender setting would have been half as successful if it had been mixed ability. I feel that of first importance is ability setting and then there are pluses, perhaps, of gender setting which are secondary to ability setting."

In an informal conversation at the end of her second year teaching single-sex groups she nevertheless claimed that further experience and reflection had caused her to re-assess her views and concede that segregating pupils was, potentially, equally as effective a strategy as setting by ability.

Teachers' responses to the questionnaire statement, "Single-sex setting would be most effective when pupils are also set by ability" suggest unequivocally a belief in the importance of ability setting; no objections were raised, and twenty teachers agreed, eight strongly.

7.4.2.3.2 Class size

Teachers were also acutely aware of the influence of pupil numbers. There was unreserved support for the questionnaire suggestion that "Pupils work better in small classes": 24 teachers agreed, twenty of them strongly. In interviews some teachers of boys' groups attributed some of the success of the grouping to the opportunity it had given them to reduce the size of the class:

(School A, Year 10): "Some of these boys would have sunk completely in larger groups - we had the benefit also of being a small group-....."

In a number of schools, however, the creation of single-sex classes had resulted in larger than average groups. While large classes of girls, and higher ability boys, did

not seem to create insurmountable problems, large classes of lower or mixed ability boys were often perceived as less manageable than large mixed-sex groups. Thus 32 higher ability boys in School C presented scarcely any disciplinary problems, in stark contrast with the 26 lower ability boys in School D and the 28 mixed ability boys in School B. Class size was frequently regarded by teachers as a key variable in distinguishing one class from another, as one teacher found in comparing her ill-disciplined Year 7 boys' group of 28 with her Year 8 group:

(School B, Year 7/8, mixed ability): "My Year 8 boys' group has only got about twenty at the most. And they are actually a pleasure to teach, that group. But that's probably to do with the numbers... they're a much smaller group."

7.4.2.3.3 The sex of the teacher

The uncertainty expressed by teachers on the effect their sex may have on pupil performance reflects the uncertainty of their pupils, and, as with the pupils, direct references to the issue made by the researcher in an effort to elicit opinion usually yielded far less insight than the research participants' unsolicited comments.

Responses to two questionnaire items relating to the sex of the teacher are clearly indicative of teachers' ambivalence in this area: fourteen votes of 'neither agree nor disagree' were recorded in response to "Girls prefer to be taught languages by a female teacher" and fifteen in response to "Boys prefer being taught languages by a male teacher". There is marginally greater conviction that boys respond more positively to being taught by a male teacher; while eight respondents disagreed with the first statement regarding girls, and three agreed, five disagreed with the suggestion that boys respond better to males and five agreed.

The theory that teachers and pupils may feel more at ease with each other when they are of the same sex (Bone, 1983, p. 91) received some endorsement in interviews:

(Ms. M, School D, Year 9): "I talk to [the girls] in a way that I probably wouldn't talk to the boys, and I don't know why. I'm just a lot more comfortable with them; I'm uncomfortable with the boys. I'm more relaxed with the girls."

(Mr. F, School D, Year 9 boys): "It probably makes a difference being a male teacher. It's definitely an advantage. I had a parent come up to me last night demanding that her son is in my class next year, saying that he feels secure with me."

While discipline problems cannot, of course, be attributed solely to the sex of the teacher, a considerable number of teachers experienced particular problems with classes of the opposite sex. Of the three boys' groups which were observed, one, taught by the only female teacher of the three, seemed less than effective. The breakdown in discipline in this group, mentioned earlier in Section 6.3.3.3 was tentatively recognised by this teacher as a possible consequence of her sex:

(School D, Year 9): "I find that I'm shouting at them more, putting them in more detentions, purely because their behaviour has gone downhill, really, but I think that might be because I'm a female teacher."

As she went on to acknowledge, however, her status in the school as a newly-qualified teacher may also have contributed to the boys' desire to "try and see how far your limit is". Two other newly-qualified teachers, both female, in other schools experienced similar disciplinary problems with their groups initially, although both resolved them to the extent that each spoke warmly at the end of the year of the close relationships they had developed with their classes. That both of these groups were all-

girls might seem to suggest that teachers with limited experience are less likely to experience disciplinary problems with single-sex classes of the same sex as themselves.

The few male teachers of girls' groups in the survey also encountered some problems with poor behaviour which resembled difficulties faced by male colleagues in other single-sex research projects (see, for instance, Danischewsky & Joseph, 1994, p. 49). These were particularly noticeable with older classes of girls, such as a Year 9 lower ability girls' group in School D taught by a young male teacher who attributed to them a "building-site mentality". On the one occasion when this group was observed, at the beginning of the academic year, 1996, this description appeared justified by the pupils' sexual innuendo, and coy giggles, which accompanied a French lesson on the theme of the body.

Like the male teacher quoted earlier, the teacher of the Year 10 boys in School E saw his sex as a distinct advantage in establishing a close relationship with the class:

"...there has been this bonding thing. At times I have felt there's been a father-like relationship. 40-50% of them are from one-parent families. I present an alternative role model. They know that I'm a dad, I'm successful in my career, I play football."

While the Year 8 boys' teacher did not refer specifically to the advantages of being male, it is of interest that he presented his relationship with the class in terms of male friendship:

"....they know I am one of their mates."

Language such as this may be a key characteristic of effective boys' groups which derive their success from a close relationship with a teacher who expresses similar interests through an interactive style to which they can relate. It is worthy of

note that the Year 10 boys' teacher in School E described his initial thoughts after taking on the group with a metaphor of aggression:

"The first thing I'm going to do is knock this group into shape."

The threat of non-physical aggression expressed through loud, and sometimes unexpected, reprimands was a salient feature of both of these boys' groups.

While it is clearly not impossible for a female teacher to employ registers which may be more boy-friendly, such as the business and football terminology used by the Year 9 lower ability boys' teacher in School D, it may be more difficult, and appear more contrived, for female staff to adopt an explicitly boy-friendly approach to pupils. That is not to say, however, that all female and all male teachers subscribe to a teaching style peculiar to their sex. Numerous researchers have found that there are at least as many similarities as differences in the teaching styles of men and women (Wilkinson & Marrett, 1985, p. 123; Powell & Batters, 1986, p. 249; Mifsud, 1993, p. 13). What appears crucial in determining the effectiveness of single-sex groups is the appropriate matching of teacher, and teaching style, with the group. While the female Year 8/9 girls' teacher in School C felt that her group was unsuccessful, and admitted that she preferred teaching boys, the female Head of Department in School D experienced two resounding successes: a lower ability boys' group and a higher ability girls' group. In both she succeeded by remaining true to her preferred, 'masculine' teaching style:

"I feel that I've given my girls a little more male hormone. We had a parents' evening last night and a few parents told me that whenever their daughters speak French or German they shout, and I had to say, 'That's my fault because I shout.' Because with the boys, I used to do that to wake them up, to get their passion going and get them involved,

and with the girls I tried to take a very mature girl-like stance, which I found quite difficult to start with, and gradually introduced the shouting and rebel-rousing and now they are totally into that way of working. They love to stand up, to shout at the top of their voices, to rap....I really feel it's revitalised them. I feel that my style hasn't changed, I like to teach like that. I've got them tuned into recognising that as work and seeing it as making learning more pleasurable. So their learning style has changed. I've introduced it to them and made it more acceptable. It's very difficult to be something that you're not...."

7.5 Teachers' perceptions of the further advantages and disadvantages of teaching single-sex groups

7.5.1 Comparisons with mixed groups

Unsurprisingly, teachers appeared to show an awareness of the potential disadvantages of teaching mixed groups, which had perhaps informed their initial decisions to segregate. Fourteen agreed with the questionnaire statement, "Mixed language lessons tend to be dominated by the boys", while thirteen supported the idea that "Pupils find it distracting to have peers of the opposite sex in the classroom".

Responses to the statement, "Mixed classes have a better atmosphere than single-sex classes" indicated greater uncertainty, suggesting that teachers found it difficult to generalise about separate classes whose characters, it was frequently noted, were clearly peculiar to them. Eleven teachers recorded their uncertainty while ten disagreed, suggesting considerable support for the theory that the single-sex classroom may represent a positive learning environment.

7.5.2 Targeting learning styles

A number of the teachers involved in the research perceived as a distinct advantage of single-sex grouping the opportunity it afforded them to tailor their teaching styles to meet the common needs and learning styles of the group:

(School B, Year 7/8): “It’s allowed me to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the boys much more clearly and, as a result, I’ve targeted areas which I feel they need to do more work on.”

(School D, Year 9): “...if there are any learning styles they become evident very, very quickly. It’s like having a sort of magnifying glass. You can pick up problems, and solutions are more readily acceptable by more students....”

Several teachers used this opportunity to address boys’ weaknesses, including organisational, social and writing skills, while teachers of girls’ groups focused their attention on encouraging girls to become more assertive and adventurous in class.

Some teachers, however, resented the time and effort needed to equip boys with the basic communication and behavioural skills required before language learning could properly begin. Such remedial training, usually regarded as unnecessary in girls’ groups, was sometimes seen in terms of being both arduous and protracted:

(School B, Year 7/8): “I’m spending a lot of time trying to teach them how to organise themselves, which is where you lose the teaching time. I’d rather teach them to organise themselves, then teach them French, rather than just plod through with all this going on, because you just can’t do it. It’s counter-productive...”

This teacher's view, that boys' performance in boys' groups improved at a much slower rate than their female peers, if at all, was shared by many of her colleagues.

7.5.3 Boys' image awareness

A large number of teachers endorsed the suggestion that boys in boys' groups may become less aware of the image they convey to their peers than in mixed groups, where the presence of girls may heighten their sensitivity to the need to conform to fashionable, anti-academic male stereotypes. Fourteen teachers agreed with the questionnaire statement, "Boys taught in single-sex groups are likely to be less aware of their 'image' ", two of them strongly, while seven were unsure and four disagreed.

In interviews, several teachers referred to both boys and girls appearing more 'relaxed' and able to ask questions, in the boys' case without fear of being teased for demonstrating an interest in work. Single-sex groups were sometimes seen as giving the pupils the opportunity to explore their interests more freely since their questions often focused not on the specific linguistic area being taught but on broader issues related to languages. In School D, for example, higher ability Year 9 girls were keen to discuss the development of different languages, and the implications of learning two languages, while the parallel boys demanded much more detailed explanations of grammatical points than the teacher had anticipated.

The teacher of the Year 8 boys' group in School D also found that his pupils were considerably more relaxed, although observation and his own comments suggested that the ease of his relationship with the class was also attributable to his status as a foreigner learning English:

"...they were very shy in the beginning. So I said, 'Look, I make

mistakes learning English, and you make mistakes in French. You teach me English, and I'll teach you French. So we are on the same level, but I have the reins of the whole thing. Sometimes I do it deliberately, to shock them, and they say, 'Sir! You can't say that!' And I say, 'Well, I don't know, I'm a poor foreigner.' And they say, 'You're doing well, Sir, you're doing well.' I take advantage of that."

This teacher's deliberate exploitation of his uncertain knowledge of English also involved his mock naive emulation of the boys' colloquial English, an action which also appeared to enhance his relationship with them. The possibility that boys' embarrassment in speaking a foreign language may be reduced when their teacher exploits the fact that he is genuinely sharing their experience of learning a foreign language must be of considerable interest to the members of a profession increasingly characterised by non-native speakers of English.

7.5.4 Difficulties in teaching an all-boys group

Teachers' responses to the questionnaire statement, "Teaching an all boys' group is likely to be more difficult than teaching a girls' group" seem to indicate some acknowledgement of the greater problems likely to be experienced in teaching boys, although the number of responses at the other end of the opinion range suggest that highly positive results can be achieved: eleven teachers agreed, six strongly; six were uncertain; and eight disagreed, three strongly. There is, however, greater support for the suggestion that boys' groups present more difficulties than mixed groups: fourteen teachers disagreed with the questionnaire item, "Teaching a mixed class is likely to be more difficult than teaching an all boys' group".

Interview discussions focused more closely on the individual problems experienced by teachers. The lack of self-control was frequently mentioned by boys' teachers who felt that it prevented them from attempting more adventurous activities:

(School B)

Ms. M: "I can't leave the boys to be as independent as I know they should be. It's much more teacher-controlled, which I don't like as much, but I find it has to be that way."

Ms. K: "As regards the boys, I'm spending a lot more time controlling. With the girls you've got more teaching time..... You'd never ever do a lot of these interview things where they've got to go round and ask each other questions.... You'd have two of them on the floor, fighting or tripping each other up. It's not worth it..."

Ms. B: "The girls do have a lot more self-control than the boys..."

The stress that teachers sometimes described in teaching boys was often related to the unpredictability of the group's behaviour:

(School D, Year 9, lower ability): "Well, a lot of the time they do work but I am constantly on edge, I never relax with them. Always on edge, waiting for something to happen. One of them to throw a bit of paper across the room, which is one of their favourite activities, and then the others to retaliate. You just never know what's going to happen. And it's very stressful. Even if nothing does happen, it's still stressful..."

(School A, Year 10): "I either had absolutely brilliant lessons with my boys, or I was tearing my hair out. There didn't seem to be anything in between. Whereas with the mixed group the lessons followed a similar sort of pattern, were more conventional, I was less likely to be pulled

off my lesson plan... I found the mixed group much more predictable than the single-sex group.”

While boys’ extreme behaviours were more often observed as negative, the intensity of their emotions was also, as indicated at the beginning of the previous quotation, sometimes interpreted positively:

(School B, Year 7/8): “The girls get a little bit, they couldn’t care less, really. They’ll do what they have to do, but they don’t have any kind of spark or enthusiasm about it. But they’re never disruptive, they just do it, whereas you could say to a boys’ group, ‘We’re going to do this.’ ‘Great!’, you know....”

For one male teacher, tuning into boys’ interests was essential in order to unleash an enthusiasm which he saw manifested in, for instance, his pupils’ work on the World Cup, described in Section 6.2.2.1:

(School E, Year 10): “I have a theory about men and women. Women are a lot clearer about their identity and can express how they feel. You can trust them to get on with things. Blokes are a lot more erratic, but when they’re stirred by something the passion is unleashed... So it’s getting into areas which they’re impassioned about....”

The same teacher shared the conviction of the boys’ teacher in School C that the polarity of boys’ emotions and behaviours meant that interaction with them was clear-cut:

“They’ve been a lot less complicated, perhaps, so that it’s been a lot more black and white. It’s made it easy for me to be very straightforward in my dealings, which they have responded to. So, if they’ve deserved reprimanding they’ve had a reprimand, if they’ve deserved praise, they’ve had it, and they’ve

accepted both of those. ...I haven't had any kids being sulky, or having some kind of vendetta against me because I've told them off."

(School C, Year 8): "There's been more forthright language - in English and the target language..."

Such accounts seem to suggest that teaching a boys' group may be a more intense experience than teaching a girls' or mixed group, and one which makes substantial demands on the teacher's ability to identify and capitalise on boys' interests, whilst at the same time exercising strict control over their behaviour.

7.6 Conclusions

The most striking feature of the teacher perceptions collected in this research is the broad diversity of opinion. While these teachers are, it seems, agreed on a principal argument for establishing single-sex groups - boys' and girls' differential learning styles - they are by no means unified in their views on such initiatives' success.

The greatest differences in opinion are, it seems, to be found amongst teachers of boys' groups. While the majority of girls' teachers agree that the setting is effective, particularly in terms of improving girls' assertiveness and speaking skills, perceptions of boys' performance in single-sex groups vary widely. An improvement in boys' performance in these groups seems to be dependent on a complex chemistry of independent variables including ability setting, class size, and, most importantly, the relationship with the teacher, and their teaching style. Other factors highlighted by teachers, but not discussed in detail here, may also comprise pupils' awareness of being the focus of some considerable attention; the timetabling of language lessons; and the turn-over of staff in language departments.

There is, it seems, a clear dividing line between those boys' groups which are effective and those which are not; this accounts for the generally broad range of distribution of teachers' responses to the questionnaire. The teachers of all-boys groups were ostensibly subject to extremes of experience. In those cases where the setting was judged effective, teachers fostered a close relationship with their pupils and saw improvements in targeted weak areas such as social and organisational skills and writing. In unsuccessful classes teachers experienced a deterioration in discipline which forced them to deliver unstimulating lessons structured to maximise control.

While many teachers accounted for these different experiences by referring to the divergent personalities of individual classes, the appropriate pairing of teachers with classes also appears to have played a key role in determining effectiveness. Success is, it seems, attainable when the teacher is comfortable with a teaching and interactional style, inevitably informed by their age, sex and experience, to which pupils can relate.

Chapter 8 **Conclusions**

8. Introduction

The thesis set out from the premise that boys' potential for achievement in foreign languages is not a "fiction" (Cohen, 1996), a fact supported by the statistics presented in the Introduction in Figure II, which illustrate that boys' performance at 'A' level proportionally parallels girls'. That girls outnumber boys in 'A' level examination entries by more than two to one, and that there is a disparity between boys' and girls' achievements at GCSE level, particularly at the top end of the grade range, is, however, incontestable.

Chapter 1 set out to account for these differences in attainment by relating how boys and girls may develop different perspectives of, and approaches to, language learning. In defiance of inconsistent 'scientific' arguments which implicitly discourage the formulation of strategies for raising boys' performance, on the grounds that boys are not biologically predisposed to language learning, the thesis argues that success in foreign languages is determined by a myriad of variables which are explored in the main body of the text. These include:

- teaching and learning styles (Chapter 4);
- pupils' attitudes to the subject (Chapter 5);
- the teaching environment, particularly single-sex schooling (Chapter 6);
- teachers' perceptions of their pupils' performance (Chapter 7).

This chapter summarises the perceived effects of each of these variables on boys' performance, integrating pupils' and teachers' views. It is divided into five main sections:

The first section underlines the relevance of the research and relates the findings to the research design.

The second section summarises boys' attitudes to foreign language learning, taking into account teachers' views of their pupils' enjoyment of the subject, and perceptions of the difficulty, relevance and supposed femininity of language learning.

The third section considers to what extent the current curriculum and dominant teaching practices seem to accommodate boys' interests and learning styles, and discusses the effect of individual teaching styles on pupils' motivation.

The fourth section constitutes an appraisal of girls' and boys' performance in single-sex groups. It also considers three further variables which may affect the effectiveness of the setting arrangement: ability setting, class size, and the sex of the teacher.

The fifth section concludes with some further ideas for consideration and recommends areas for further research.

8.1 The relevance of the research and the research design

The research can be seen as filling two gaps in the field of research into language teaching and learning. First, it makes a contribution to the under-investigated field of foreign, as opposed to second, language research and, second, it deviates from the common practice of focusing merely on outcomes, that is the inferred effectiveness of language teaching methods, styles and settings. Instead, it represents a holistic investigation of processes and attitudes, necessitating careful data management and triangulation. The adoption of a predominantly qualitative approach has allowed for the study of numerous affective variables. It was felt that a quantitative approach, with an emphasis on statistics, could contribute little to our understanding of the multiple

affective variables which influence boys' attitudes. The central objective - to give a holistic picture of the processes by which boys learn languages, and the influences acting upon them - has necessarily informed the research design and choice of research instruments.

As Chapter 3 made clear, the research design does not strictly conform to any one research model, but, rather, adopts features of three paradigms of inquiry: ethnography, the case study, and action research. The findings should, therefore, be viewed in the context of the principles associated with these approaches, described in greater detail in Chapter 3, and outlined below.

In keeping with ethnographic designs, the study employs principally qualitative, descriptive methods in order to investigate boys' performance in the broad context of each individual school setting. This, and a loose adherence to the principle of 'grounded theory', has allowed the researcher to investigate multiple variables, as they have suggested themselves, as being potentially important in influencing pupils' learning. No attempt was made to control these variables; rather, the study presents sets of 'real-life' snapshots of the experiences of pupils and teachers in different schools. Interpretation of the data collected was undertaken with a certain degree of reflexivity, that is on the understanding that the researcher's own interpretation of social reality inevitably informs her analysis, and that the findings may have been influenced by external factors beyond her control, including her physical, or implied, presence.

Since the data refers to individual case studies, it should be remembered that these findings may not be generalised to apply to other schools. This characteristic does not, in the researcher's view, limit its usefulness, since many of the variables and phenomena described here are likely to be identified as common to many schools, and

may be of value in informing ongoing, and future, research projects and initiatives in similar areas.

As Chapter 3 made clear, the design shares some characteristics of action research insofar as the research stimulated reflection on a problem, boys' underachievement, and encouraged the teachers and, to a much lesser extent the researcher, to collaborate in devising effective teaching strategies to remedy the problem. This aspect of the study was generally viewed by those involved as both rewarding and relevant.

8.2 Pupils' attitudes to foreign language learning

Chapter 5 underlined the strong correlation between pupils' positive attitudes and their academic attainment. It is argued that success in modern foreign languages is heavily dependent on pupils' positive attitudes to the subject since two characteristics distinguish it from other curriculum areas: pupils are introduced to the subject at a much later stage of their schooling than most other subjects, when they are especially sensitive to how their attitudes to subjects might colour their public image amongst their peers; and, since the subject is interpersonal, it makes particular demands on pupils' personalities, especially their ability to empathise with foreign peoples. Boys' generally less positive attitudes to language learning were registered by both teachers and pupils, although, as the summary of findings below indicates, attitudes were seemingly influenced by a broad range of diverse variables.

8.2.1 Pupils' enjoyment of modern foreign languages

The study seems to confirm other research findings which suggest that girls enjoy learning foreign languages more than boys, a view which was also broadly

upheld by teachers (see Section 6.3.1). Girls' greater preference for languages is, it seems, evident even before pupils begin learning languages in secondary school, as illustrated in Figure XIV in Chapter 5. Such figures suggest the wisdom of teachers explicitly addressing pupils' preconceptions about language learning either in primary school, or in the early stages of secondary school. Awareness-raising courses, focusing not merely on language acquisition skills, such as those suggested by Hawkins (1987), but also discussing the applications and benefits of language learning, could perhaps serve to dispel some of the prejudices feeding boys' demotivation which, as Section 5.2.1 outlined, increases steadily throughout secondary school.

The large numbers of pupils of either sex who claim to dislike the subject might be seen as a greater cause for concern than the disparity between boys' and girls' professed enjoyment. In response to Pupil Questionnaire 3, less than a third of girls (30.8%), and less than a quarter of boys (22.7%) claimed to enjoy learning French or German, and almost as many girls as boys cited French as their least favourite subject.

While the majority of boys and girls, however, do not seem to have an extreme like or dislike for modern languages, this general nonchalance may develop into demotivation in many pupils of either sex who, it has been seen, perceive languages as particularly difficult at Key Stage 4. Efforts made by teachers to reduce the apparent gap between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, which was also documented as a problem in the HMI report (1985), would perhaps help to reduce the threat of pupils' increased disillusionment at a crucial juncture, in the two years leading up to the GCSE examination. A greater awareness of the difficulties posed by a subject with which pupils have far less contact than with other school subjects, to which they are introduced in primary school, would, no doubt, also help to relieve the pressures exerted on pupils at Key Stage 4. This awareness could usefully be shared by the

writers of foreign language textbooks. The researcher's own use of textbooks in teaching, and informal discussions with teachers, suggest that there is often a discrepancy between the first textbook on a course, used at Key Stage 3, and the follow-up, used at Key Stage 4, which is often considerably more difficult. The issue may also have implications for exam syllabuses. Many teachers report seeing their pupils' motivation increase after the introduction of modular courses, which represent an alternative to courses that are wholly examined, and share similarities with the Graded Objectives schemes described in Section 4.1.3.

8.2.2 Variables which influence pupils' attitudes to languages

The findings suggest that both parental approval and the pupils' contact with native speakers may be significant variables in determining their attitudes to language learning. For boys, who are recognised to be instrumentally motivated, the opportunity to use the language abroad seems to be more important than for girls. This suggests, of course, that socio-economic factors may play an important part in motivating boys; schools which have predominantly low-income catchment areas are, by corollary, more likely to suffer problems with boys' demotivation.

While the questionnaire results seemed to show that boys and girls rate their ability in language learning equally, boys' comments in interviews sometimes revealed their sensitivity to girls' academic and linguistic superiority. Such comments inherently represent a strong argument for the establishment of single-sex groups in which boys' performance would perhaps be less likely to suffer from their potential feelings of inferiority. The creation of single-sex groups also set by ability might, in addition, give many boys the opportunity of being in a higher ability group to which they might not otherwise have access, as was the case in School E.

The study supports other researchers' findings that boys are more motivated than girls by a recognition of the relevance and usefulness of learning a language (see Section 5.4). In contrast with other studies, however, the findings suggest that a decline in pupils' estimation of the usefulness of language learning as they grow older is not restricted to boys. Many pupils believed that languages are not as important as other subjects and often demonstrated an extremely limited awareness of the possible applications of foreign languages, usually falling victim to the misconception that that one would never need to use a foreign language in this country. This would suggest that boys' motivation, in particular, may be increased by being informed, in lessons or careers guidance, of the vocational, social and cultural benefits of learning foreign languages. The importance of pupils' socio-economic background was underlined once more in the finding that pupils from School C, which had the most affluent catchment area, and whose pupils had the most opportunities to travel abroad, were most likely to recognise the vocational benefits of language learning. Boys' home background is, it would seem, a highly significant variable in determining their attitudes to the subject.

The suggestion that boys do not succeed in language learning because they see it as a 'girls' subject' was thrown into question by pupils' responses in the study. In interviews and questionnaires, an overwhelming majority of pupils claimed to see it as equally important for boys and girls, and sometimes even expressed objections to the mere suggestion that there should be any difference. This finding should clearly be heeded by the many writers and researchers who often depict the subject in this way. It is of interest that their unsupported hypotheses bear a greater resemblance to teachers' views on this issue. While the teachers in this study were not as convinced as those in Batters' study (1988) that their pupils regarded the subject as more suitable for girls, a considerable number suspected that girls were more likely to see it as more important

for them, in contrast to the pupils' unequivocal dismissal of this idea. This discrepancy may have serious implications for boys' motivation; teachers who subscribe to this notion may, like the teacher in Sunderland's study (1998), be tempted to have higher expectations of their female pupils, and to gear their teaching towards them. It should, however, also be remembered that pupils' spoken, or written, claims may not be an accurate representation of their true feelings, but a response informed by an awareness of what they are ethically obliged to say. Even so, it is clearly the case that the theory that foreign languages is a 'girls' subject' is by no means as clear-cut as many would suggest.

Teachers and pupils seemed to agree on pupils' overall preference for French, as opposed to other languages. The suggestion mooted in Chapter 1, Section 1.4.4, that German or Spanish may be preferred by boys, was not confirmed in this study, although the tiny proportion of pupils learning a language other than French in the sample who completed Pupil Questionnaire 3 - 16% - would seem to support Phillips' and Filmer-Sankey's theory (1993) that boys' less than enthusiastic response to languages may well be a reaction to French, and that boys' underachievement may be related to an inadequate range of languages on offer in schools.

8.3 Teaching and learning styles

The suggestion implicit within Chapter 4's description of the recent 'democratisation' of foreign language provision in the UK is that all pupils, and particularly boys, might benefit from the predominant communicative teaching model. Bearing in mind the common characteristics of boys outlined in Chapter 1, a teaching model which relegates strictly academic practices in favour of an emphasis on authentic, purposeful communication might be supposed to enhance boys' learning. As

Chapter 4 underlines, however, current teaching models, which sometimes fall short of the communicative ideal, do not always accommodate pupils' learning preferences.

Furthermore, while boys may appreciate some aspects of communicative teaching, such as 'information gap' exercises which demonstrate that language is a means to an end, there is also a suggestion implicit, for instance, in the views of boys who commented on revision in Section 4.4.6, that a more formal, didactic approach, or at least a combination of methods determined by the needs of the group, might be preferable.

The findings suggest that effective teaching is central to pupils' motivation and also that pupil personality, a variable rarely commented on in research of this kind, may be an equally, or even more, important, determinant of their learning styles and preferences as their sex, as indicated below.

8.3.1 Pupils' responses to the four core skills

8.3.1.1 Speaking

While the study seems to support other researchers' findings that boys enjoy speaking in language lessons, (see Section 4.3.1.1) the findings also suggest that the age of the pupil and their self-confidence may be more important factors in determining attitudes than their sex. More girls than boys responded positively to the statement in Pupil Questionnaire 3 on enjoyment of speaking. That pupils of both sexes appreciate the practical benefits of learning how to speak a foreign language was suggested by the majority's agreement with the questionnaire statement, "It is better to learn how to speak French/German rather than how to write it" (see Section 4.3.1.1).

Boys' motivation to speak in the target language in front of the rest of the class seems to decline with age. The study suggests that boys in adolescence develop a

greater sensitivity to peer pressure which dictates that manifestations of academic competence, such as volunteering answers to teachers' questions, may threaten their acceptance by their male peers. The teachers in the study seemed to confirm boys' marked preference for speaking activities such as drama and role-play, activities which, it was claimed, allow them to escape their uncertain roles in class and adopt a fixed, imaginary role.

While the importance of mobility for boys in lessons is often cited in other studies, the findings of this study suggest that girls' enthusiasm for active learning tasks is equal to, or even greater than, boys'.

8.3.1.2 Listening

The difficulty experienced by many boys in listening was documented by both teachers and pupils. While boys and girls often identified the speed of recorded texts as the main problem, boys' responses to aural activities which involved 'hands-on' application of the information gained through listening, creativity, the use of visuals, or filling in a genuine information gap appeared to be considerably more positive than the girls'.

8.3.1.3 Reading

A significant disparity was recorded between boys' and girls' attitudes to reading in a foreign language. Boys' dislike of reading was often related to their inability, or unwillingness, to access unknown vocabulary in texts, resorting instead to dependence on the teacher. This observation would seem to recommend the necessity of encouraging, and equipping, pupils to use dictionaries through explicit instruction in lessons. Notwithstanding the current GCSE examination's employment of dictionaries,

pupils were rarely observed using them in class. This could, however, be accounted for by financial constraints on schools and pupils which mean that the provision of a dictionary for every individual pupil is not always possible. The study's findings would suggest that, in order to raise pupil achievement in languages, LEA's, or schools themselves, should attribute equal importance to this provision, as to the provision of Internet access, repeatedly referred to by the current government as an important prerequisite for raising standards. IT might, however, also represent a stimulating alternative to conventional dictionaries which, as Section 4.3.3.3 related, could have particular benefits for boys.

Teachers and pupils highlighted the importance of textbooks which are visually engaging. Cartoons and comics were regarded as particularly motivating for boys, while boys also responded more enthusiastically than girls to reading activities involving physical activity or IT. Boys and girls were not stimulated by tasks with no practical outcome, such as reading for cultural background information.

Boys' ignorance of how to tackle cloze texts or other more mechanical language tasks, which were frequently completed in lessons, was observed on several occasions. This suggests that teachers might usefully incorporate in their teaching discussion of reading, and other learning, strategies with pupils. As was observed in the conclusion to Chapter 4, such awareness-raising of language learning styles is regarded by some as a feature of communicative language teaching, but it is a feature which is often ignored in practice, perhaps to the particular detriment of less linguistically mature boys.

8.3.1.4 Writing

That boys experience particular difficulties with writing was noted by teachers and pupils alike. Teachers' comments on boys' writing skills frequently focused on poor presentation and a lack of accuracy. This might lead one to suggest, echoing Powell's view (1986), that there remains amongst some teachers an over-emphasis on neatness, which may prevent them from appreciating the soundness of the content. In some cases there may also be an academic insistence on accuracy no longer required by the GCSE syllabus, which purports to accommodate all abilities by stressing the importance of the fundamental ability to make oneself understood by a native speaker.

Classroom observation revealed that writing activities frequently took the form of copying from the board or from a textbook. If writing is restricted to uncreative reproduction of this kind, it might help to explain why a number of pupils found it difficult to manipulate language independently. While this has clear implications for teachers, it might also be argued that the current syllabus, with its strong transactional emphasis, does not allow for, or encourage, such independence, promoting instead rote learning of set phrases.

The current syllabus's emphasis on letter-writing and formal, reading comprehension-style tasks might also serve to explain boys' demotivation. The findings of the study suggested a clear difference between boys' and girls' responses to these kinds of task, with girls responding much more enthusiastically. It is, it seems, a particularly important factor in motivating boys to write, while combining writing with visuals or drama may also inspire boys. Considerations such as these might be seen as grounds for teachers entering pupils for exams which include an element of coursework, and allow such interests to be accommodated, if only to a limited extent. Section 4.3.4.3 illustrates how the production of a piece of coursework on the World

Cup succeeded in engaging Year 10 boys' interest. Findings such as these suggest that current, examination-led syllabuses, which offer little scope for creativity, may often fail to accommodate boys' learning styles and interests.

8.3.2 Teachers' perceptions of pupils' work-related skills and behaviours

While a number of the teachers in the study noted that boys were often not as compliant as girls, and forcefully expressed an aversion to work which did not comply with their own agenda of interests, some related how their efforts to structure work around boy-friendly topics had produced resoundingly successful results in terms of boys' achievements. The findings would suggest that there is a direct correlation between the teacher's ability to key into boys' interests, and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly, and boys' achievements. As Francis has warned, however, the dangers of neglecting girls' interests by pursuing such a policy in mixed teaching groups need to be heeded (1998, p. 166). From the point of view of protecting and supporting girls' interests, there is a strong argument for developing sex-specific strategies in single-sex groups.

Teachers frequently recognised that boys were disadvantaged in language learning by their deficient organisational and social skills. Some teachers of all-boys groups felt that a single-sex setting enabled them to target these deficiencies through, for instance, providing pupils with a clear structure to lessons and to their progress, consistently implementing clear groundrules and commending co-operative and supportive behaviour. Almost all the teachers of boys' groups, however, expressed an awareness of the potential disciplinary problems posed by such a group, which were seen either to be accentuated or to be reduced, sometimes to the point of almost total elimination, as the teacher-pupil relationship developed. There was a general feeling

amongst teachers that boys' lack of self-discipline often made boys' groups more difficult to teach than girls' groups.

8.3.3 The importance of other variables relating to teaching and learning styles

The findings suggest that making boys less teacher-dependent in language learning might increase their motivation. Both boys and girls claimed to prefer working in pairs or groups rather than on their own, while boys' choice of favourite school subjects usually included subjects such as art, music, and technology in which they were able to work at their own pace. Boys did, however, recognise that their own lack of self-discipline often prevented them from working well by themselves in a group.

Boys, it seems, do not respond well to using textbooks extensively, but appreciate that doing homework and tests is important. Observation and interview data suggest that boys generally respond well to doing tests and appreciate the benefits of having this discipline imposed upon them.

Boys also seem to participate enthusiastically in activities which involve competing, either with another group, or with the teacher. A competitive interest in how parallel girls' groups were progressing proved to be a motivating factor for most of the boys' groups, sometimes developed without the teacher's intervention. However, such competition in all-boys groups needs to be managed carefully if it is not to deteriorate into aggression. This can be effectively achieved through counterbalancing activities which indulge boys' interests, such as competitions, with rewards for social behaviours, often displayed without the teacher's encouragement in girls' groups. These might include offering assistance to peers, sharing equipment, recognising others' achievements, and not mocking peers' pronunciation.

The internal identity conflicts which seem to be experienced by many boys, as described in Section 4.4.5, might pose a particular problem in modern languages which, as has already been mentioned, makes more demands on individuals' personalities than other subjects. Boys, it has been suggested, may feel that language learning poses a particular threat to the image they seek to project to their peers since it demands public demonstration of interactional skills which are often associated with females and which, in many boys, are underdeveloped. Observation in the study suggests that many boys may feel uncomfortable when they are publicly associated with academic success, a finding which has particular implications for teachers' interactions with pupils and, amongst other things, the display of pupils' work. A small number of the teachers of boys' groups seemed to achieve resounding success by re-defining the popular hegemonic masculine image. In these groups, a reversal of the image was achieved, along with a remaking of the group ethos; academic success became desirable for boys. Such cases clearly represent the key to raising boys' achievement and the processes by which such a result is gained warrant much closer investigation. Its occurrence in all-boys groups might also suggest that the reversal is best effected in such groups, although the focus of this study has not, of course, allowed the researcher to analyse similar effects in mixed groups.

8.3.4 The role of the teacher

For the overwhelming majority of pupils, the role of the teacher appears paramount in shaping their attitudes to, and achievements in, modern languages. When pupils who were being taught languages in single-sex groups for the first time, and by a different teacher, were asked what had made the most difference in their perceptions of

the subject, most referred primarily to the change of teacher. Pupils' negative views of languages were frequently related to the teaching style.

Pupils were critical of being taught by different teachers from one year to the next and sometimes seemed to find it difficult to adapt to a new teacher's way of working. The following features of the teaching style emerged as particularly important for both boys and girls: having a good relationship with the teacher; the teacher having a sense of humour, which boys seemed to appreciate slightly more than girls; the teacher explaining the aims of the lesson at the start; and teachers providing adequate, and appropriate, revision opportunities. This last feature seemed to be especially important for boys who, it seems, often appear unaware of how to undertake revision, and would, therefore, appreciate explicit guidance in class, along with teacher-led revision sessions.

While pupils in interviews generally seemed happy with the amount of target language used by the teacher, questionnaire responses suggested less satisfaction. The use of the target language with regard to boys' learning styles would seem to suggest itself as an area demanding further study.

8.4 The single-sex grouping as an affective variable in pupils' performance in modern languages

The study suggests that most pupils' apprehension about being taught in a single-sex group often diminishes as soon as they are being taught in the group. Pupils' responses to the setting appear to vary widely, however, and there appears to be a greater number of differences between the responses of individual groups, regardless of sex, than between the responses of boys and girls.

8.4.1 Pupils' perceptions of learning modern languages in single-sex groups

Questionnaire responses suggest that boys may enjoy learning languages in single-sex groups more than girls, and that both boys and girls are more convinced that the grouping is conducive to hard work, than that it is enjoyable. The findings suggest that the older boys are, the less likely they are to enjoy being taught in a single-sex group. Most pupils seemed to experience considerable difficulty in assessing the importance of the setting in influencing their attitudes, however, and often named a combination of the teacher and the setting as the most important influences. The single-sex setting alone was rarely named as the most important factor in determining pupils' attitudes.

Large numbers of boys and girls commented on feeling more confident in a single-sex group. While girls often experienced relief at no longer being subjected to boys' poor behaviour, boys often acknowledged that, in a single-sex group, they were relieved of the "pressure to impress" (Section 5.6.3.1.1) which characterises mixed groups. Many boys and girls thus felt less embarrassed about speaking the foreign language in a single-sex group, although boys were rather more convinced of this benefit than girls, and there is some evidence to suggest that single-sex groups may encourage boys, but not girls, to speak more in language lessons. The role played by the teacher in encouraging pupils to speak was clearly an important variable in this respect.

Boys' responses to whether the setting was benefiting their work varied widely. Negative responses were usually related to the poor behaviour of the group and to the teacher's ability, or inability, to manage the group. Classroom observation suggested that the most effective boys' groups were those over which the teacher exercised strict control. Teachers' comments in interviews suggested that teaching an all-boys group

generally makes far more demands on teachers' classroom management skills than teaching an all-girls group.

8.4.2 Teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of single-sex groups

Most of the teachers involved in the study expressed strong support for the suggestion that single-sex groups may benefit girls. The question of whether single-sex grouping was effective in raising boys' achievement gained a diverse range of responses; teachers were less likely to see a single-sex initiative as an effective short-term measure for improving boys' performance.

While some teachers appreciated the opportunity afforded by single-sex groups to target boys' deficient social and organisational skills, a considerable number resented the effort and time taken to train boys in fundamental skills, and seemed to resent the slow progress made in these groups. A considerable number perceived as a distinct advantage the fact that boys were able to relax more in the absence of girls and were less likely to feel the need to perform to an audience.

The majority of teachers were aware that teaching an all-boys group represented a rather more intense experience than teaching an all-girls or mixed group; boys' lack of self-control and the unpredictability of their behaviour were mentioned as particular problems. A few teachers, however, felt that the polarity and intensity of boys' emotions could offer certain advantages; they described how relationships with boys were likely to be more clear-cut and related the passion with which their pupils had engaged with some topics.

Classroom observation suggested that the most effective boys' groups were those in which the teacher managed both to foster a close relationship with their pupils and to exercise strict discipline. A number of other variables were also perceived by

teachers and the researcher to influence the effectiveness of these groups. These are described below.

8.4.3 Other variables which are perceived to affect pupils' performance in single-sex groups

Three variables emerged from the data collected from teachers as being potentially important in determining the effectiveness of single-sex groups: ability setting, class size, and the sex of the teacher. Single-sex setting was generally considered to be most effective where groups were both set by ability and relatively small in size. The findings suggest that teachers are more likely to experience disciplinary problems when teaching a group of the opposite sex. Female teachers may find it more difficult than male teachers to relax in boys' groups and to use language to which boys can relate. That is not to imply, however, that all female teachers will encounter such problems; in the course of the research one female teacher came to realise that her preferred teaching style resembled that of many male teachers. The key to a successful pupil-teacher relationship appears to lie in the appropriate pairing of a class with a teacher to whose teaching style they can relate.

8.4.4 The effectiveness of single-sex initiatives in raising pupils' achievement

While it has already been emphasised that quantitative analysis of pupils' assessment and examination results is outside the remit of this largely qualitative study, it would nevertheless appear appropriate at this stage to compare the GCSE results of the Year 10-11 pupils taught in School A with those of their peers taught in mixed groups. Boys' and girls' results compare favourably with those of their peers: 68% of the boys in the single-sex group achieved an A*-C grade, compared with 33% of boys

in the mixed cohort, and 89% of the girls in the single-sex class gained an A*-C, compared with only 48% of their peers in mixed groups.

While these results should not be regarded as conclusive evidence of the effectiveness of single-sex groups, particularly since the comparison is between two single-sex groups and four mixed groups, they nevertheless appear to suggest the potential of single-sex groups for raising pupil achievement. Within School A itself, they served to support the department's conviction that the single-sex setting was effective, albeit for a large number of reasons.

8.5 Concluding comments

The research explores a wide-ranging area which has received little research attention. It has sought to bring together data from multiple sources in order to give insight into the complex field of pupils' perceptions of learning modern foreign languages.

In conducting this study it has not been the aim of the researcher to detract from girls' current academic success in foreign languages by focusing on boys' performance. As stated in Chapter 2, the decision to research boys' performance in single-sex groups was, in fact, informed by an awareness of the dangers of focusing on boys' learning styles in mixed groups. The research was shaped by the recognition that the many opportunities which modern foreign languages may have to offer to boys are very often missed. In conforming to pressures which dictate that masculinity is expressed through unco-operative and non-communicative behaviours, many boys may fail either to develop the valuable social skills which the subject aims to foster, or to experience the enjoyment and satisfaction of achieving interaction with foreign peoples in another language. Encouraging boys to succeed in a foreign language may, therefore, form part

of a healthy process of deconstructing harmful masculine stereotypes and behaviours. It is recognised that teachers have a responsibility to ensure that *all* pupils achieve their full potential, whatever their learning styles, sex or cultural priorities, and that research in education has a clear role in working with them to clarify their experiences and to enable them to meet this objective.

While single-sex groups are currently being established in increasing numbers to boost pupils', especially boys', academic achievement, little attention is paid by teachers or researchers to the affective implications for pupils and teachers. Disregarding the reciprocal relationship that exists between the cognitive and affective effects of single-sex teaching will surely limit its success. In the worst case, practice which is not based on the realisation that single-sex groups heighten pupils' awareness of gender roles will be counter-productive in reinforcing stereotypical behaviours (Tett, 1997). Mahony's theory (1985) that boys in all-boys groups express their masculinity through aggressive behaviour has already been corroborated by a number of schools who have been forced to abort single-sex initiatives by the discipline problems experienced in all-boys classes. Academic initiatives may have much to learn from single-sex projects which set out to raise pupils' awareness of gender roles.

We should be aware that in condemning boys' potential in modern languages as "fiction" (Cohen, 1996) we are subscribing to the monolithic stereotyping which gender researchers so often try to avoid but nevertheless find themselves doing. As Jackson has argued, masculine identities are neither innate, nor intractable:

"....conventional, manly characteristics, like being strong, powerful, hard and daring, are not innate qualities that all men and boys are born with, but, alternatively, are mainly social constructions forged out of culture, ideology and history...."

(Jackson, in Epstein et al, 1998, p. 88)

Cohen's accusation (op. cit.), made from a radical feminist standpoint, that efforts to improve boys' performance in foreign languages are both futile and morally reprehensible, might be countered with another feminist argument: that the promotion of languages for boys must necessarily go hand-in-hand with promoting the perception of the female. Success in projects like G.I.S.T. may, it might be claimed, have been easier to attain because the initiative encouraged girls to overcome their inhibitions and aspire to achieve traditionally male ideals, the values of which are self-evident in a patriarchal society. Similar projects to improve the achievement of boys in a traditionally female domain might have to improve the profile of female skills before the profile of the subject could be enhanced, potentially a rather more difficult objective to attain. Connell (1995) writes of making advances in education through "invert[ing] the hegemony that characterized the old dominant curriculum" (p. 239) by "...Requiring boys to participate in curriculum organized around the interests of girls", a goal he describes as one of the "classic goals of education - to broaden experience, to pursue justice, to participate fully in culture" (p.240). Such goals should, it seems to the researcher, be pursued by all those with an interest in equity in education.

8.5.1 Recommendations for further research

Like all research, this study has generated at least as many questions as it has been able to answer. There remain many more related questions which have, to date, received little research attention. The field of foreign language teaching and learning research is a vast, and as yet largely under-investigated, area which would benefit particularly from more qualitative studies focusing on processes and contexts rather than merely on outcomes.

The research has suggested a number of variables affecting pupils' attitudes to languages which it has been unable to explore in any depth but which deserve closer attention. The part played by parents in shaping pupils' attitudes was described in Chapter 1, and Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2, went on to present a brief discussion of parental approval as a variable in pupils' perceptions of modern languages. More detailed investigation into parents' views, and the way in which they are conveyed to and influence their children, would broaden understanding of the issue.

It was suggested in Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1, that pupils' ethnic origin may play an important role in determining their achievement, a claim corroborated by generic research in this area. The debate on underachievement in modern languages could be enhanced by detailed investigation into, for example, the attitudes of pupils of Asian and Afro-Caribbean origin to the subject.

The findings of this research have suggested the importance of the establishment of effective teacher-pupil relationships. Section 4.4.6 described how pupils generally claimed to be happy with the amount of target language used by the teacher, in spite of the frustration and difficulties this sometimes caused them. Classroom observation suggested that sound pupil-teacher relationships were sometimes threatened by the demands placed on teachers to make maximum use of the target language. Closer investigation into the extent to which the teacher's extensive use of the target language might jeopardize these relationships, thereby influencing pupils' attitudes and performance, could be timely.

The findings also suggest the key role played by boys' 'image awareness' in raising achievement. Ways in which teachers might successfully reconstruct boys' images both of academic success, and of the subject, as described in Section 7.3.3, also clearly warrant further, systematic investigation. While this study suggests that pupils

are reluctant to see language learning in terms of its supposed femininity, the evasiveness of many pupils would seem to recommend more in-depth work in this area to establish pupils' true thinking, and the implications this may have on their performance.

The study has also looked briefly at the issue of the sex of the teacher. Further research might look more closely at the interaction between teachers and pupils in order to establish whether male pupils respond more positively to a 'masculine' interactional style. Given that this study has underlined the importance of pairing pupils with a teacher to whose teaching style they can relate, further investigations might focus on the nature of this teaching style and determine to what extent styles can be described as 'masculine' or 'feminine', and how they may be distinguished.

The urgency with which schools are currently addressing the problem of boys' underachievement would seem to recommend action research which could either usefully monitor the implementation of teaching strategies designed to raise boys' achievement or contribute to the design of language awareness courses which both raise the profile of language learning and train boys in how to approach foreign language tasks. Some research has recently been undertaken in the area of learning strategies (see, for instance, Harris, 1998) but further investigation, focusing specifically on boys and classroom-based findings, would be of use.

Greater insight into the issue of boys' performance could be given by systematic identification of criteria which characterise a small number of schools in which boys achieve a similar, or the same, degree of success in modern languages as girls. Reliable evidence of the effectiveness of single-sex grouping as a means of raising pupil achievement could be obtained by undertaking a longitudinal study. Like Smith's evaluation of single-sex initiatives in mathematics (Smith, 1986; 1987), such a study

could usefully monitor both single-sex and mixed groups, which are strictly controlled by the researcher, within the same school.

The research also seems to suggest that focusing on examination syllabuses may contribute to our understanding of why, and where, boys are underachieving. Such investigations might usefully compare pupils' achievements in modular and exam-led courses. Research investigating whether exam syllabuses might be seen to fail to reflect boys' learning styles or interests would clearly be of value.

Finally, the issues raised here suggest that much would also be gained from an international comparison of trends in boys' achievements in foreign language learning. Such a comparison could help to isolate those features of foreign language pedagogy which inhibit or promote boys' achievements and contribute to debates surrounding the effectiveness of the communicative model.

APPENDIX A

Pupil Questionnaire 1

This questionnaire was administered to 288 Year 8 pupils in Schools B and D in June 1996.

You do not need to write your name on this sheet, but please circle girl or boy below:

BOY / GIRL

Which of the following activities do you enjoy or do you think you would enjoy in language lessons? Tick the box that best describes your feelings about each. Unless you are told otherwise all of the activities are carried out in the foreign language.

	enjoy	don't mind	dislike
• speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• games, e.g. hangman, bingo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• answering the teacher's questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• listening to a tape so that you can complete a table	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• acting out a short dialogue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• filling in the gaps in a piece of writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• matching up questions with answers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• matching a caption or title to a picture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• inventing a caption or title for a picture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• drawing a picture to show the meaning of a phrase	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• moving around the class, interviewing others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• reading about the different way of life in France/Germany/Spain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• drawing a graph or pie chart to show the results of a survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing answers to questions about an advert	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing answers to questions about a letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing answers in English to English questions about an advert	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	enjoy	don't mind	dislike
• writing answers in English to English questions about a letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing a role play with a partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing a letter which your teacher is going to send to France/Germany/Spain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing a description of yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• watching videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• asking a foreign language assistant questions about her- or himself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• playing games with flashcards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• following directions from a tape to find a building on a map	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• putting the lines of a conversation into the right order	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• singing songs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• listening to a story on a tape	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• reading a cartoon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• designing your own cartoon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• using a dictionary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• using the computer to play games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• using the computer to write a postcard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• listening to a description of someone wanted by the police and drawing that person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• listening to a foreign language assistant talking about school or Christmas in their home country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• moving around the classroom, matching up signs on the walls with English signs on a list	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• working in groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• working on your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• working with a partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Can you describe briefly the most enjoyable language activity you can remember?
 It does not have to be one of those mentioned in the list above.
 Write your answer below.

APPENDIX B

Pupil Questionnaire 2

This questionnaire was administered to pupils in Schools A, B, C and D, in one of the following three formats, in July 1996.

Questionnaire I was completed by pupils who had been taught in single-sex groups for the duration of that academic year and Questionnaire II by their peers who had remained in mixed groups. Questionnaire III was completed by a sample of pupils in School D who were about to be segregated in the next academic year.

QUESTIONNAIRE I

YEAR 10 - JULY 1996

Read the questions below and circle the answer that best describes your feelings. Please delete as appropriate words that are underlined.

NAME: _____

- 1) Are you enjoying learning French/German?
YES IT'S OK NO
- 2) Do you like being in an all girls/boys group?
YES IT'S OK NO
- 3) Do you think that you are working better in an all boys/girls group?
YES NOT SURE NO

Fill in the gaps in the sentence below with your own words (eg. enjoyable, annoying, good, not very good):

Learning a language in a single-sex group is _____ because

QUESTIONNAIRE II

YEAR 9 - JULY 1996

Read the questions below and circle the answer that best describes your feelings. Please delete as appropriate words that are underlined.

NAME: _____

- 1) Are you enjoying learning French/German?
YES IT'S OK NO
- 2) Do you like being in a mixed (girls and boys) group?
YES IT'S OK NO
- 3) Would you enjoy being in an all boys/girls group for French/German?
YES NOT SURE NO
- 4) Do you think you would work better in an all boys/girls group for French/German?
YES NOT SURE NO

Fill in the gaps in the sentence below with your own words (eg. enjoyable, annoying, good, not very good):

Learning French/German in a mixed group is _____ because

QUESTIONNAIRE III

YEAR 8 - JULY 1996

Read the questions below and circle the answer that best describes your feelings.

NAME: _____

1) Have you enjoyed learning French this year?
YES IT WAS OK NO

2) Did you like being taught in a mixed (girls and boys) group?
YES IT WAS OK NO

3) Do you think you will enjoy being in an all boys/girls group for French?
YES NOT SURE NO

4) Do you think you will work better in an all boys/girls group for French?
YES NOT SURE NO

Fill in the gaps in the sentence below with your own words (eg. enjoyable, annoying, good, not very good):

Learning French in a single-sex group will be _____ because

APPENDIX C

Pupil Questionnaire 3

This questionnaire was issued in June-July 1997 to all pupils in Schools A, B, C and D who had been taught in single-sex groups for at least one academic year. It was also completed by their peers in mixed groups who were either in the same year group or, where the whole cohort had been segregated, in the year group below or above them.

The format of the questionnaire varied slightly to investigate issues relevant to the year group to whom it was administered. Two examples are included here: Questionnaire I was administered to Year 7 pupils in School B, and Questionnaire II to Year 11 pupils in School A who were at the end of their lower school career.

Where pupils were learning two languages, such as in Schools B and C, they were asked to select either their favourite language, or the language which they had been taught in single-sex groups, and base their responses on it alone. In School A the small number of pupils learning German were asked to base their responses on German alone.

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK MODERN LANGUAGES RESEARCH PROJECT
PUPIL QUESTIONNAIRE - YEAR 7
SCHOOL B

We would very much like your help in finding out about teaching and learning modern languages. Please help us by filling in this questionnaire. It will NOT be shown to your teacher; we are interested in your honest opinions.

PART 1- GENERAL INFORMATION

To help us classify your responses statistically we need to ask a few questions about yourself and your family. Please write your answers in the spaces provided.

A.

Name.....

Male ☐ Female ☐ (please tick)

Age.....years.....months

Are you being taught French in a mixed or single-sex group?

Mixed ☐ Single-sex ☐ (please tick)

Have you learned any French before this year?

Yes ☐ No ☐ (please tick)

If you answered 'Yes' can you say where you learned French and how long for?

.....
.....
.....

B.

What is your favourite subject?

.....

Which subject do you dislike most?

.....

Do you enjoy school?

Yes ☐ It's OK ☐ No ☐ (please tick)

C.

What jobs do your parents/guardians do? If they are unemployed please write down the name of their last job.

Father:.....

Mother:.....

PLEASE TURN OVER

D.

Please tick ONE of the statements below:

- I think boys are better at languages than girls ☐
- I think girls are better at languages than boys ☐
- I don't think there's any difference ☐

E.

Please tick ONE of the statements below:

- I think it's more important for boys to learn languages ☐
- I think it's more important for girls to learn languages ☐
- I think it's equally important for girls and boys ☐

F.

Have you ever visited a country where French is spoken?

- Yes, once ☐ Yes, more than once ☐ No, never ☐

G.

Please tick ONE of the statements below:

- I have only ever been taught French by a MALE teacher ☐
- I have only ever been taught French by a FEMALE teacher ☐
- I have been taught French by FEMALE and MALE teachers ☐

H.

Which second language are you going to choose next year?

- German ☐ Spanish ☐ (please tick)

Can you explain briefly why you are going to choose this language?

.....

.....

.....

.....

PART 2 - ATTITUDES TO FRENCH

Thank you for answering the questions in the first section. This section is to find out how you feel about French.

Read the statement and circle the response which best describes your feelings. Don't spend too long thinking about it; we're interested in your immediate impressions.

1/ I enjoy learning French	YES	IT'S OK	NO
2/ I think I am quite good at French	YES	NOT SURE	NO
3/ I speak a lot of French in the lessons	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
4/ French is a useful subject	YES	NOT SURE	NO
5/ You learn French better in a single-sex group	YES	NOT SURE	NO
6/ It's better to be taught by a teacher of the same sex as yourself	YES	NOT SURE	NO
7/ French is a waste of time	YES	NOT SURE	NO
8/ Single-sex groups for French are more fun	YES	NOT SURE	NO
9/ My parents are glad I'm learning French	YES	NOT SURE	NO
10/ I would like to go to France/Germany	YES	NOT SURE	NO
11/ French is a difficult subject	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
12/ I enjoy speaking in French	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
13/ Mixed groups for French are more fun	YES	NOT SURE	NO
14/ Boys are better than girls at languages	YES	NOT SURE	NO
15/ Single-sex groups for French are boring	YES	NOT SURE	NO
16/ Girls are more likely to use languages than boys	YES	NOT SURE	NO

PLEASE TURN OVER

17/ You get more work done in a mixed group for French than in a single-sex group	YES	NOT SURE	NO
18/ It is embarrassing speaking French in class	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
19/ It's distracting to have pupils of the opposite sex in the French lesson	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
20/ You learn French better in a small class	YES	NOT SURE	NO
21/ It's better to have a male teacher teaching an all boys' group	YES	NOT SURE	NO
22/ I think I've learned a lot of French this year	YES	NOT SURE	NO
23/ I think I will use my French when I leave school	YES	NOT SURE	NO
24/ There is a good atmosphere in my French class	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
25/ You learn French better when you're with your friends	YES	NOT SURE	NO
26/ I work well when we are in pairs/small groups	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
27/ I enjoy writing in French	YES	NOT SURE	NO
28/ It is better to learn how to speak French rather than how to write it	YES	NOT SURE	NO
29/ I find it difficult to understand spoken French from the tape-recorder	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
30/ I like using text books in French	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
31/ The size of the class makes no difference to how well you work	YES	NOT SURE	NO
32/ I enjoy doing role plays in the lessons	YES	SOMETIMES	NO

THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH

MODERN LANGUAGES RESEARCH PROJECT
PUPIL QUESTIONNAIRE - SCHOOL A

We would very much like your help in finding out about teaching and learning modern languages. Please help us by filling in this questionnaire. It will NOT be shown to your teacher; we are interested in your honest opinions.

PART 1- GENERAL INFORMATION

To help us classify your responses statistically we need to ask a few questions about yourself and your family. Please write your answers in the spaces provided.

A.
Name.....

Male ☐ Female ☐ (please tick)

Name of French set or class.....

Were you taught in a mixed or single-sex class for the last two years?
Mixed ☐ Single-sex ☐ (please tick)

Age.....years.....months

B.
What has been your favourite subject at School A?
.....

Which subject have you disliked most?
.....

Have you enjoyed the last four years at school?
Yes ☐ It was OK ☐ No ☐ (please tick)

C.
What are your plans for next year? (eg. stay on in the sixth form; find a job; go to college)
.....
.....
If you are thinking of studying further which subjects are you hoping to take?
.....
.....

D. What jobs do your parents/guardians do? If they are unemployed please write down the name of their last job.

Mother.....
Father.....

E. Have you ever visited a country where the language you were studying is spoken?

Yes, once ☐ Yes, more than once ☐ No, never ☐

F. Please tick ONE of the statements below:

I have only ever been taught French by a MALE teacher ☐
I have only ever been taught French by a FEMALE teacher ☐
I have been taught French by FEMALE and MALE teachers ☐

G. Please tick ONE of the statements below:

I think boys are better at languages than girls ☐
I think girls are better at languages than boys ☐
I don't think there's any difference ☐

H. Please tick ONE of the statements below:

I think it's more important for boys to learn languages ☐
I think it's more important for girls to learn languages ☐
I think it's equally important for girls and boys ☐

PART 2 - ATTITUDES TO MODERN LANGUAGES

Thank you for answering the questions in the first section. This section is to find out how you feel about French.

Read the statement and circle the response which best describes your feelings. Don't spend too long thinking about it; we're interested in your immediate impressions. **Unless the question states otherwise try and think ONLY about the last two years.**

1/ I've enjoyed learning French at School A	YES	IT WAS OK	NO
2/ I think I am quite good at French	YES	NOT SURE	NO
3/ I spoke a lot of French in the lessons	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
4/ French is a useful subject	YES	NOT SURE	NO
5/ You learn French better in a single-sex group	YES	NOT SURE	NO
6/ It's better to be taught by a teacher of the same sex as yourself	YES	NOT SURE	NO
7/ French is a waste of time	YES	NOT SURE	NO
8/ Single-sex groups for French are more fun	YES	NOT SURE	NO
9/ My parents are glad I'm learning French	YES	NOT SURE	NO
10/ I would like to go to France	YES	NOT SURE	NO
11/ French is a difficult subject	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
12/ I enjoyed French more in Years 7, 8 & 9 than in Years 10 & 11.	YES	NOT SURE	NO
13/ I enjoyed speaking in French	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
14/ Mixed groups for French are more fun	YES	NOT SURE	NO
15/ Boys are better than girls at languages	YES	NOT SURE	NO
16/ I've worked harder in the last two years than I did in Years 7, 8 & 9	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
17/ Single-sex groups for French are boring	YES	NOT SURE	NO
18/ Girls are more likely to use languages than boys	YES	NOT SURE	NO

19/ You get more work done in a mixed group for French than in a single-sex group	YES	NOT SURE	NO
20/ French was much more difficult in Years 10 & 11 than in Years 7, 8 & 9.	YES	NOT SURE	NO
21/ It was embarrassing speaking French	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
22/ It's distracting to have pupils of the opposite sex in the French lesson	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
23/ You learn French better in a small class	YES	NOT SURE	NO
24/ It's better to have a male teacher teaching an all boys' group	YES	NOT SURE	NO
25/ I think my French has really improved in the last two years	YES	NOT SURE	NO
26/ I think I will use my French when I leave school	YES	NOT SURE	NO
27/ There was a good atmosphere in my French class	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
28/ You learn French better when you're with your friends	YES	NOT SURE	NO
29/ I worked well when we were in pairs/groups	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
30/ I enjoyed writing in French	YES	NOT SURE	NO
31/ It is better to learn how to speak French than how to write it	YES	NOT SURE	NO
32/ I found it difficult to understand spoken French from the tape-recorder	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
33/ I liked using text books in French	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
34/ The size of the class makes no difference to how well you work	YES	NOT SURE	NO
35/ I enjoyed doing role plays in the lessons	YES	SOMETIMES	NO

THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH

APPENDIX D

Pupil Questionnaire 4

This questionnaire was administered in July 1998 to all pupils in the three all-boys classes who had been observed and to the parallel girls' groups.

We would very much like your help in finding out about learning and teaching modern foreign languages. Please help by filling in this questionnaire. It will NOT be shown to your teacher; we are interested in your HONEST opinions.

PART 1 - GENERAL INFORMATION

Which year are you in ? (please tick - ☒)

Year 8 ☐

Year 9 ☐

Year 10 ☐

Are you:

female ☐

male ☐ ?

PART 2 - LEARNING FRENCH

Which of the following activities do you enjoy or do you think you would enjoy in French lessons? Tick the box that best describes your feelings about each. Unless you are told otherwise all of the activities are carried out in French.

	enjoy	don't mind	dislike
• speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• acting out a role play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• moving around the class, interviewing others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• answering the teacher's questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• playing games with flashcards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• following directions from a tape to find a building on a map	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• listening to a tape and filling in a grid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• games, eg. hangman, bingo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• watching videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• listening to a description of someone wanted by the police and drawing that person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• reading cartoons/comics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• moving around the classroom, matching up signs on the walls with English signs on a list	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• using the computer to play games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• reading about the different way of life in France	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• putting the lines of a conversation into the right order	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing a letter to a hotel in France	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• designing your own cartoon in French	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• using the computer to write a letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing a description of yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing answers to questions about a letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing a role play with a partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• writing a letter which your teacher is going to send to France	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• learning about French grammar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• working on your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• working with a partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• working in a group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE TURN OVER!

	enjoy	don't mind	dislike
• using worksheets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• working from a textbook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• lessons in which the teacher speaks mainly French	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you had some say in how French was taught, what would you do more often?

.....

.....

.....

In your opinion, which of the following things are important for a pupil who wants to do well in French?

	important	not sure	not important
• being in all-boys/-girls group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• being in a group where everyone is of the same ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• being in quite a small class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• that the teacher has a good sense of humour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• being in a group with your friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• having regular tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• looking good in front of the rest of the class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• having a good relationship with the teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• getting homework regularly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• doing homework on time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• the time of the lesson (ie. morning or afternoon)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• knowing that you'll use your French in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• competing with other pupils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• the teacher explaining the aims of the lesson at the start	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PART 3 - SINGLE-SEX GROUPS

Please circle the answer that best describes your feelings about learning French in an all-girls/-boys group.

- 1) Have you enjoyed learning French this year?

YES
IT WAS OK
NO
- 2) Has it been more or less enjoyable than last year?

MORE
NOT SURE
LESS
- 3) Did you like being in an all-girls/-boys group?

YES
IT WAS OK
NO
- 4) Do you think that you have worked harder in an all-boys/-girls group?

YES
NOT SURE
NO

Many pupils comment on the 'different atmosphere' in an all-girls/-boys group for French. Can you describe the differences, if you have noticed any, in your own words?

.....

.....

.....

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH

APPENDIX E

Teacher Questionnaire

This questionnaire was completed by all modern languages staff from the case study schools either in summer, 1997 or summer, 1998.

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK MODERN LANGUAGES RESEARCH PROJECT
STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE

Your help is appreciated in investigating boys' attitudes to modern languages and in evaluating the success of single-sex initiatives.

Please provide the following information about yourself:

School:.....

Female / Male (delete as appropriate)

Age:.....

Length of teaching experience:.....

Number of years in present post:.....

Languages currently taught:.....

Did you teach any single-sex groups last year? - Yes / No (delete as appropriate)

Please give brief details of the group below, indicating the year group and gender.

.....
.....
.....

Have you had any previous experience of teaching single-sex groups? - Yes / No

If you have answered 'Yes' please provide the following information:

Number of years teaching all boys' groups:.....

Number of years teaching all girls' groups:.....

Type of school (eg. comprehensive, independent):.....

Now please turn over and indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements. Please tick one box only for each statement and do not spend too long considering each; we are interested in your immediate reactions.

Please try to think only about the year group(s) involved in the initiative.

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
1/ Girls may learn languages better in single-sex groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2/ Boys consider language learning to be a feminine activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3/ Languages are perceived to be more useful by girls than boys.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4/ Mixed language lessons tend to be dominated by the boys.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5/ Boys work well in small groups and pairs in mixed classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6/ Girls may be more confident in single-sex groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7/ Boys prefer being taught languages by a male teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8/ Mixed ability sets do not lend themselves to language teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9/ Single-sex groups may enable staff to accommodate boys' and girls' differing strengths and weaknesses in languages.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10/ Girls are better than boys at languages.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11/ Girls taught in single-sex groups may have a more positive attitude to languages.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12/ Pupils work better in small classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13/ Boys find speaking in the target language in a mixed class embarrassing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14/ Pupils find it distracting to have peers of the opposite sex in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15/ There is no difference between boys' and girls' ability in languages.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16/ Girls enjoy languages more than boys.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17/ Mixed classes have a better atmosphere than single-sex classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
18/ Boys lack the application needed for language learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19/ Boys find listening more difficult than girls.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20/ Boys may learn languages better in single-sex groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21/ Boys may work well in small groups and pairs in single-sex groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22/ Single-sex groups may help to improve boys' social skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23/ Boys taught in single-sex groups may be less likely to see languages as a 'girls' subject'.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24/ Boys do not enjoy role-plays in language lessons.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25/ Single-sex groups may help to reduce the gap in boys' and girls' achievements in languages.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26/ Boys and girls have different learning styles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27/ Girls may work well in pairs and small groups in single-sex classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28/ Teaching an all boys' group is likely to be more difficult than teaching a girls' group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29/ Boys taught in single-sex groups may have a more positive attitude to languages.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30/ Girls work well in pairs and small groups in mixed classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31/ Boys do not like using text books.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32/ Boys taught in single-sex groups are likely to be less aware of their 'image'.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33/ Single-sex setting would be most effective if pupils were also set by ability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34/ Boys do not enjoy writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
35/ Boys prefer learning German to French or Spanish.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36/ Teaching a mixed class is likely to be more difficult than teaching an all boys' group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37/ The social disadvantages of a single-sex group outweigh any benefits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38/ Boys may be more willing to speak in the target language in an all boys' group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39/ Girls prefer to be taught languages by a female teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40/ Languages are perceived to be more important by girls than boys.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you wish to add comments on any aspect of language teaching or the single-sex initiative please feel free to do so in the space below.

.....

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP

APPENDIX F

Interview schedules

Chapter 3 gives details of when, and how often, interviews were conducted.

Two examples of interview schedules follow. Schedule I was used with pupils and Schedule II with staff.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE I

PUPIL INTERVIEWS - SCHOOL B - JULY 1996 **(AFTER SEGREGATION)** **boys - Year 7**

- 1/ Can you tell me your names and your favourite and least favourite subjects?
- 2/ What do you like about your favourite subjects?
- 3/ Where is French on a scale of subjects if your favourite is at the top and your least favourite at the bottom?
- 4/ Why do you place it there?
What do you like/dislike about French?
- 5/ What do you think about speaking/listening/reading/writing?
- 6/ Do you think French will be useful in the future? Is it a good idea learning French?
- 7/ Have you decided which language you're doing next year?
- 8/ Why have you chosen German/Spanish?
- 9/ What do you think about having been taught in this all-boys group this year? Has it been a good idea? Or would you have preferred being in a mixed group? Or have you not noticed any difference?
- 10/ Do you work harder in an all-boys group?
- 11/ Do you think it makes any difference being taught by a woman? Do you think it would be better being taught by a man? Or is there no difference?
- 12/ Do you think boys or girls are better at learning languages, or is there no difference?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE II

STAFF INTERVIEWS **SCHOOL E JULY, 1998**

- 1/ Have you enjoyed teaching the all-boys group that I've been observing?
- 2/ Do you feel it's been a success?
- 3/ What differences have you noticed between this group and a mixed group?
- 4/ Has it been more successful with any of your other groups?
- 5/ Has there been any development in the group?
- 6/ What, do you feel, have the boys done well?
- 7/ What have they found difficult?
- 8/ Do you feel that boys in an all-boys group are less self-conscious, less aware of their image?/ more confident?
- 9/ How have you had to adapt your teaching style to meet the needs of the group?
- 10/ Do you think your being male/female has made any difference?
- 11/ Do you feel that single-sex setting is an effective means of raising boys'/girls' achievement?
What do you think would be more effective?

APPENDIX G

Pupil interview transcript

See Chapter 3, Section 3.2.5.5 for details of how the interviews were conducted.

All interviews were transcribed. Two transcripts are included here as a sample.

SCHOOL D- JULY 16TH, 1996

(BEFORE SEGREGATION)

Boys - Year 8

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

- D is the quietest of the four. When he makes an effort to contribute, his voice is often swamped by the others'. He is clearly thoughtful and has considerable ability.
- S is very vociferous and often expresses his thoughts before they are clearly formulated. He seems the least able of the group.
- M clearly has some firm opinions and is quite articulate. He appears quite mature for his age and very confident.
- C is sensitive to his image amongst the others and clearly likes to have fun. He also expresses his opinions in quite a mature fashion, however. He seems less able than M but more able than S.

AB: OK, is it D?

D: D

AB: What's your favourite subject, D?

D: Errrr, music.

AB: Right, and what don't you like, then?

D: Maths.

AB: Maths, right.

S: S. I like drama and art and I don't like maths.

AB: Right, maths isn't very popular...

M: My name's M and I like technology and music and drama, and I don't like maths.

AB: Don't like maths, right, my goodness it's not getting a good press, maths.

C: My name's C and my favourite subjects are design and technology, art and drama, and I don't like maths.

AB: No, well it's good that you're missing maths. Is this why you all volunteered to do this interview? Right, good. So, why do you like music, art, drama and technology?

S: Because they're different from just sitting at desks like normally, like writing or whatever.

C: Yes, you're doing something physical, and it's more fun.

M: You get to express your feelings in music and drama. In technology you get to build stuff, create things.

C: I've always enjoyed making things, putting things together.

AB: Yeh, so you make things at home?

C: Yeh.

AB: So, are those the sorts of things you do at home? Perhaps they're more like hobbies.

C: I used to try to when I was younger, I used to try and make things (laughs and others smile/titter)..go-karts, stuff like that.

AB: Has it got anything to do with the fact that you don't sit down for the whole lesson?

S: Yes, because we do that all the time, and it gets a bit boring, so when you get the chance to do something a bit different...you might as well take it.

AB: Nobody mentioned French or German at all. (interrupted by teacher). So, shall we take French first? Did anybody learn any French or German before they came to this school?

S: I learnt numbers and stuff like that...in the last year just to get ready for here.

AB: Right, was that useful then, or...?

S: A bit.

D: Pretty useful.

AB: Right, so what do you think of French?...being completely honest.

D: I think it's a good subject. I enjoy it most of the time, but sometimes I don't like it.

AB: What don't you like?

D: Pronouncing the words. Sometimes it's pretty hard.

AB: So you have to get the pronunciation really accurate?

D: Yeh.

AB: What do you think about that, C, because you're doing German, aren't you?

How do you find the pronunciation?

C: Errrr, it sounds to me like the pronunciation in French is much harder.

M: Yeh, my cousin says.....

C: And it's harder to read as well.

M: I thought I was going to get put into German when I first came.

AB: Would you have liked to have done German?

M: Yeh, I don't mind French, I think it's a good subject and we should be taught it, but the thing I don't like is somehow every time I do French it's always in the afternoon, and I'm always tired in the afternoon. I'd rather just have a subject what I can do easily, and I find French not hard, but you have to like concentrate. I'd rather have it in the morning, when I'm fresh.

AB: Right, well that's an interesting point.

C: It's the same with me, I work on it(?) in the afternoon when I'm all tired, and I've just been playing football, or been outside(?).

AB: So it demands a lot of concentration?

All: Yeh..

C: After like being tired, it's just the fact that you've got to sit down for the whole lesson, working, concentrating hard.

S: I don't mind it, because it's useful to have once you leave, because if you ever like, well 'cos France is just over the Channel Tunnel and like we'll probably go there once we're older, so it's quite useful.

AB: Has anybody been to France?

M: Yeh

AB: And did you use your French?

M: No.

AB: Why not?

M: I never got chance to. All we did was we went to the Met and bought stuff and I thought they were conning me or something, because they just didn't look very big, because the change they'd given me was so little. We just went to the beach and had a look round, at the Bayeux tapestry and stuff.

AB: Right, interesting. What about the rest of you, then, do you think it is useful learning a language?

All: Yeh

AB: Yeh?..C is unsure. What do you think, C?

C: I wouldn't say it was very important, but it can be useful , but it ain't really, really important.

AB: Do you think other things are more important?

M: Yeh.

S: Yeh, because French probably wouldn't get you a job, but if you're good at maths and English...

C: Maths and English, that's more like general knowledge, isn't it?

M: Science,...those are the sorts of things you've got to know. I don't like 'em but I

have to do 'em, that's my view.

AB: So, thinking about things that you do like doing in French, the difficult things D's just said are pronunciation. What sorts of things do you like doing in French?.....(refers to questionnaire)

M: I like speaking, that's good and the listening's all right, the writing, that's hard, I don't like enjoy it, I just do it, but the main one I like is speaking

S: The problem with the listening tapes is because they're like French, and it's fluent, it's really hard to understand them, because like Miss T, she can understand what they're saying, but I can't understand them.

C: Same with us. Miss, teacher, will say it differently to what's on the tape, so.....

AB: And it always sounds really fast, doesn't it?

All: Yeh.

AB: Right, so speaking? And does everybody enjoy speaking?

All: Yeh (quietly)

AB: What about speaking to the teacher? Or do you prefer speaking to other people, say if you're doing interviews, or you're in pairs, or in groups.

M: Speaking to the teacher.

S: Yeh, 'cos if we're in groups everyone tends to just cheat and.....

(Some laughter, general agreement)

D: The teacher knows what you're saying and like people in your class they know as much French as you do, so they just

S: They can't really correct you.

AB: So you're not embarrassed talking to the teacher, in front of everybody else?

S: Well, sometimes you get laughed at if you don't know how to say it, totally wrong or something.

C: I prefer doing dialogues and playing games.

S: I like playing games. We do the sheets with the crosswords on and that and wordsearches.

AB: Flashcard games?

C: Yeh, when Miss holds a card up.

AB: Do you like playing memory games?

All: Yeh. We only played that in Year 7.

AB: Oh, you don't play now?

M: She did it at the beginning of Year 8.

AB: Would you like to be doing that now?

S: Yeh, 'cos it helps you remember things

AB: Is it easier to remember words if you've got a picture?

D: Yeh, definitely, because you see the picture and then you know what goes with the picture and you just know the word.

AB: What don't you like, then? Writing wasn't very good, was it?

M: I find that difficult.

C: I don't mind the writing. I don't like listening.

S: I don't like the writing because you don't know how to put things together, 'cos there's little things like 'is' that we'd say and you don't know the things like that.

C: Word order. It's weird.....(group of voices)

S: They say it backwards.

M: It's complicated. Like we'd say 'The hat is blue' and then the French would say 'The blue hat' or something like that

AB: Or the hat blue?

M: Yeh.....It would be easier if we were taught when we were little

babies, because babies like, not babies but toddlers,(interrupted by S 'like when we were at our old school 'cos then we would have picked up more) would have picked it up better.

C: I don't like the separable verbs bit because you've got a word that's two words and if you put it in a sentence you have to separate them.....(group of voices)

M:the past tense.

S: I found that really hard. It's like I go, she goes, and you really need the pictures for that.....like she had little people

C: You've got du bist and then things like that.

D: And you've got feminine and masculine.....(general agreement)

S: They change, and they add e's

M: That was really confusing.....

S: You've learnt it all and then they say female or male and you mess it all up.

AB: And you've got an extra one in German, of course, because you've got neuter.

M: What's that?

AB: It's like neutral.

M: We've got that as well,.....no. plural

AB: Would the three of you learning French prefer to be learning German?

S: We haven't really had the choice yet, it won't be until we come back.

M: If I would have started doing German in Year 7 I would have carried on with German but since I've started learning French I may as well just carry on.

S: It's better sticking to one, I think, because you get all confused.

AB: Why would you want to do German, then? What's so attractive about German?

M: Because my cousin says it's more simple than French. I didn't really want to do French.

C: The word pronunciation in German is easier, but when it comes to writing sentences the word order.....

S.: I don't know much about German but it seems a (load of letters?)

C: It's strange.....these separable verbs...if you want to put it in a sentence you've got to separate it.

AB: D, what about you, were you happy with French?

D: I think I'd rather do German, because I've heard from a lot of people that it's easier than French. The speaking,....it sounds like a good language.

AB: How about a completely different language? How about doing Spanish?

M: My friend says he wants to do Spanish because his dad lives there.

C: It sounds hard.....

S: He knows a bit of it, anyway, ...because I think it's a bit like French....he lived there when he was little.

M: I'd (like to do?) Japanese.

AB: Why would you like to do Japanese?

M: I just would.

S: A challenge.

M: Not many people know it.

S: 'Cos French and German are quite common languages, and a lot of people know them.

AB: What did you feel when you were told that you were going to be taught in an all boys' group next year? How did you feel about that? Is it a good idea?

M: I thought it was a bad idea.

S: I thought it was a bad idea, 'cos mixing all the boys from all the other classes....for

the teacher it may be harder to control. We'll all talk, rather than when we're with the girls, they all talk to each other.

C: You can't say certain things to the girls that you can to the boys.

AB: What do you mean exactly?

M: Yeh, I don't get that, either.

C: (It would be easier to talk, even if it wasn't about German?).

AB: Is it easier to talk to boys?

C: Yeh.

AB: So you think it will be good to be in an all boys' group?

All: No.

M: I think it will be a disaster.

AB: Why?

M: Because all boys together.....

D: We're loud.

M: We're lively and that..it's bad enough in P.E.

C: It is...

M: Especially when you put all boys together in a lesson and you're trying to do work.

S: And I think the forms that we're mixing with and some of the people...

C: Once in my history lesson I looked and one side of the room was all boys and the other side of the room was all girls for some reason, I don't know why. It's like that most of the time, so if our class got split up I don't think they'd mind.

AB: That's an interesting point, because very often you find that you mix with boys as friends, outside in the playground, or if you're going out. So perhaps it's not such a bad idea. Or do you think you won't be serious enough?

S: That's what I think; there might be messing around more, because like if you're with girls, I don't know what it is, but they just seem a bit more grown up.

M: They set the tone and if they're quiet you're quiet.

AB: But do you think it will be good being in an all-boys' group in that you'll all have similar sorts of interests? You might be able to talk about football or rugby ...

M: But you shouldn't be talking in the lesson.

AB: No, but I mean in French, or in German.

M: Yeh, but you do in your normal classes.

S: I think it's all right if we're mixed with girls really, 'cos you still talk to 'em, it's just that sometimes there's a group of girls....and they don't speak to anyone.

M: They just sit there.

S: They just sit out in the corner and everyone else talks.

AB: Who talks the most at the moment in your classes. Is it girls or boys?

M: In our French classes?

AB: Yes.

S: In French it's boys.

C: I think it's about 50/50.

S: Because we've got a group of girls in our class who are really quiet.

C: We've got the same. We've got this group of girls; they do their work and they're good and everything, but they get carried away and they're so loud and they laugh....they just get carried away.

AB: Would you prefer to be taught by a man or a woman. Would it make any difference?

S: It might because we might not learn about.....If you are on about rugby and that you might not learn all of the French you might just learn what we're interested in, not as a class like.

AB: If you were taught by a man?

S: I mean if we were all boys. We'd want to learn different things, but then at the end of it you wouldn't probably be learning as much.

AB: But would it make any difference if you were being taught by a man?

M: I'm (with?) it. I've been taught by two women in French and I would just accept a man to teach us. I'm not bothered. I don't think there'd be any change.....it's if you're being taught good.

S: As long as you're still learning everything.

AB: So it depends on the quality of the teacher?

M: Being taught good. Not like just make everyone sit in front of the class and give you a big lecture. They actually teach, they do games and all that...

S: I reckon they should play a lot more games. Miss T's sort of stopped.

C: It would get us more interested..

S: It makes you learn in a fun way....'cos like if you just sit there and copy loads of stuff off the board, that's it. Once you've wrote it, you don't have to go back to it.

M: I don't even look at it.

S: If you play a game, and you keep playing a game every lesson it's a bit more of a fun way

D: It(unclear) your memory.

S: You can still have a laugh about that and you're not getting told off or anything

C: Sometimes, every couple of weeks, every single lesson is just writing, writing, writingif you had more games people wouldn't mind it as much.

AB: So who's better at learning languages? Boys or girls?Or are you all the same?

D: I think it's girls, isn't it? I think that's one of the reasons why...

S: I didn't think I was that good at it but I've been put into the higher group but when it come to the exam I didn't really revise much and I thought I'd forget everything but I did really well in it

C: When I was watching the news it was saying that girls are proving to be more clever than boys in all subjects.

AB: Do you agree with that?

M: No

C: Err..No

D: It might be on average, but just in your own class

C: On average, girls are more clever than boys because, like I just said, they're more grown up and the boys tend to talk more. If you're watching telly there's hardly any women's sport on that they can talk about and we always talk about football and basketball.

AB: So there's lots of distractions?

D: Yeh.

END

SCHOOL C - 8/7/96
(AFTER SEGREGATION)
Girls - Year 8

Description of participants

All 4 girls seem very unsure and nervous before the interview, particularly V who asks if she's going to have to say anything!

R is very bright and a little timid initially.

L and E are of average ability. L seems to have just entered the school, having previously attended a school in a different part of the country.

V is quite weak academically.

The girls regularly establish eye contact with each other during the interview. Attempts are clearly being made to evaluate me, and mistakes I make with their names do not go unnoticed by them.

Setting

The interview is conducted in a workshop, with another class in the room next door. We perch on stools in a corner of the room.

E: My name's E. My favourite subjects are P.E. and maths and I don't like geography.

V: My name's V. I like P.E. and I don't mind history but I hate geography.

: My name's R. My favourite subject is art and I don't like textiles.

L: My name's L. My favourite subject's science and I don't like history.

A: Thank you. Why do you like your favourite subjects? Let's start with P.E. Why do you two like P.E.?

V: Because you don't have to write anything.

E: Because you don't have to learn anything. You don't have exams.

A: What about art?

R: It's what I'm best at.

A: So you get your best marks in art? What about science?

L: Same as R. I get my best marks in science.

A: But you enjoy these subjects as well, presumably? Is that important, do you think you've got to like a subject so that you can get good marks?

All: Yes.

R: Sometimes.

V: It just depends really.

A: So nobody's mentioned languages at all. If you see your favourite subject as at the top of a ladder and your least favourite at the bottom, where would you place modern languages, French and German? E?

E: Towards the bottom.

V: Ummmm. Just a bit past the middle, going downwards.

R: A bit above the middle.

L: Just below the middle.

A: Tell me, why this lack of enthusiasm for languages?

PAUSE- GIGGLES

A: OK. What don't you like about languages?

R: Learning verbs.

L: It's complicated.

E: Yeh, it's complicated, especially when you have French and German 'cos you get mixed up. With the same teacher as well.

R: 'Cos when you look at the teacher and you think German and it's French.
A: Just remind me. In Year 7 did you start with French and German?
All: No, just French.
A: And last year you did German as well as French and the same this year, and at the end of this year you can choose one or the other or both?
All: Yeh.
A: So, learning verbs isn't popular. Anything else that springs to mind?
V: Speaking.
L: Speaking.
A: What kind of speaking?
V: Speaking in French about what you like doing 'cos you get a bit stuck and the teachers say you should understand, but sometimes it's a bit hard to....you know....
L: When she asks you questions and you don't know them.
L & R: It's embarrassing. (SHY LAUGHTER)
A: So it's speaking in front of a class?
All: Yeh.
A: What about speaking with a partner? In pairs?
All: That's OK....That's good....
A: And in groups? The same?
All: Yeh.
A: Is there anything else you can think of that you like?
E: French feasts.
L: Oh yeh. We had a feast and we all had to bring our own foods.
A: Right, so you like eating in French lessons? (LAUGHTER)
And did you speak any French while you were eating?
All: No. (LAUGHTER)
A: But I bet you can remember the names of the foods now, can't you?
V: Sometimes it slips your mind but then you're reminded and you remember.
A: Is there anything else that you like? Games or role play?
E: We don't play any.
A: You don't play any games?
V: We do sometimes. We do crosswords.....they're good (unclear - with Mrs. P)
A: Do you use any flashcards?
All: Yeh
A: Is that good?
(FROWNS, HEADSHAKES)
R: I can never see them.
A: So are flashcards popular or not?
L: Half and half really.....They are when you know what they are.
V: It's a good way of learning them.
E: They remind you of what they are.
A: Why's that?
L: Because you can see what they're doing on them. (GIGGLES)
A: So you can remember the picture? Do you think French and German will be useful in the future?
PAUSE
E(?): Could be.
V & L: It depends what job you're in.
V: Because if you work on an aeroplane as a air hostess you need to know different languages, and travel agents. If you got transferred to a different country as well.

A: Or if you're an engineer or a chemist.....

R: Or a French and German teacher.

A: So you haven't really thought about that yet, whether it might be useful?

All: No.

A: What are you going to opt for next year, or don't you know yet?

V: P.E. (LAUGHTER)....sorry.

A: I thought you'd opt for P.E. But French or German? You have to opt for one, don't you?

All: French.

V: Because we've been doing it for longer.

R: And it's easier.....it's easier to pick up.

V: And also we only have one German lesson a week and two French.

A: And last year?

L: I was the opposite when I was in my last school. We had two German and one French.

A: So you might be taking German then, L?

L: I might do because I know more German because I did it in Year 7.

A: What about you, R?

R: French, I think.

A: Why's that? Because it's easier, you just said, didn't you? What do you find easy about French?

R: It's more like English.

A: Is it?

V: Some bits are.

?: Yeh.

V: You have to pronounce things different ways and the accent you've got to use, well you haven't got to, it helps.

A: Do you enjoy reading in lessons?

LONG PAUSE - LAUGHTER

E: I don't understand what it is.

V: If you don't understand you don't feel like asking the teacher in front of other people who can, who know the word.

A: Do you not have dictionaries?

V: We're expected to bring them, but quite a few people forget them.

E: I don't like reading out loud, either. 'Cos you don't get the accent right and you don't sound....

V: People laugh at you as well.

A: What about writing?

All: That's OK... I like it..

E: I'd rather do that than reading.

V: And speaking.

A: Why do you prefer writing?

R: 'Cos you don't say it.

E: 'Cos you don't have to get the accent right.

A: And that's hard in speaking, is it?

V: And there's a lot of words in the book you can just sort of look up and.....

A: So you don't like speaking in front of a group. Has that got any easier or any more difficult being in an all girls group?

All: (WITH EMPHASIS) Yeh. Easier.

R: The boys just butt in.

V & L: And they laugh as well....if you don't know it it's horrible.

E: Its' embarrassing and they can't do it anyway.

A: So you're unanimous on that. Has anyone noticed any other differences since you've been in this all girls group?

R: I've got good marks.

A: Last year?

R: Yeh.

E: I got best marks when I was with the boys.

V: Some people feel more confident. The girls feel more confident at speaking out and if the boys were there they'd say 'Oh no. Pick me..' 'Cos with girls together you're like one of a.... all alike... but boys are just....

L: Stupid.

All: Yeh. (LAUGHTER)

A: But you're still not very keen on speaking out in front of the group. Do you think you speak out any more?

All: Yeh.....

V: Yeh, some girls do. Some girls really go for it, but....it depends. If I'm asked I'll say something. Depends on the question.

A: Most of you said you've got better marks, apart from E. Have you, R and L?

R & L: Better.

A: A lot better, or....?

R & L: A bit.

A: Do you find that in this all girls group you work any harder?

E: No.

R: Only because the teacher's always saying, 'Let's try and get ahead of the boys'.

A: Does that work?

R: Not really.

A: Is it about the same, then? Do you think it makes any difference being taught by a male or female teacher?

V: I think it's better for the girls being taught by a female teacher 'cos she understands you a bit more.

L: You can relate to them.

R: You can ask things easier.

A: And you're less embarrassed?

V & L(?): Yeh.

A: Have you ever been taught languages by a male teacher?

L: I have.

A: Was there a big difference?

L: No, not really.

A: That was in another school, was it?

L: Yeh. About the same.

A: But you still prefer being taught by a female teacher, do you?

L: Yeh.

A: Good. Last question. Do you think boys or girls are better at learning languages, or is there no difference?

L: No difference.

L & R & V: It depends....depends who they are.

V: Boys always say they're better but I think we're just as good as them. They just make out. But I think they're more better at speaking.

E: Yeh, they've got more confidence.

V: And I think we're better at writing.

L: Yeh.

A: One last thing. Your least favourite subjects were maths, geography, history and textiles. Why don't you like those subjects?

E & L: It's boring.

R: The teacher can never get organised...so I never make anything.

V: Because it's quite hard to revise when you have the end of year exams because there's quite a lot to learn about....because you have to learn about the weather and places and what they're like....you just can't remember quite a lot.

A: Why don't you like history?

L: It's just boring. It's not very interesting really. Based about the same things lots of times.

A: Dates.....

V: There's a lot of people called the same thing as well.

A: Charles.

V: Mary, Mary, Mary.

A: That's it. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX H

Observation checklist

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Pupil attitudes to learning MFL

1. Pupil motivation

- do pupils remain on task?
- do they display interest in the subject? (body language; unsolicited discourse)
- are they more motivated by some topics/activities than others? Which?

2. Use of the target language

- in interaction with each other - is it used in pair/group work? How often?
- in dialogue with the teacher - do pupils use the TL freely in response to the teacher's questions? Are they reluctant to speak out in front of their peers? Are the teacher's questions in the TL answered in English, or not answered at all?
- in unsolicited discourse - do they mock the TL?

3. Pupils' free opinions

- in questionnaires
- in unsolicited discourse
- ethnocentricity - do they voice opinions on the French? Do they reveal cultural stereotypes?

Pupil attitudes to each other

4. Pupil-pupil interaction

- do they interact with each other? With whom - a small circle of friends? How - across the classroom? How often?
- what does their body language say about their relationships with each other?
- what is the substance of their interaction? Work-related? Leisure-related? School-related?
- what kinds of language do they use to interact? Aggressive? Supportive? Derogatory? Complimentary?
- how do they react to each other in a teacher-led activity? How does this differ from their reactions to each other during independent work or at the beginning or end of a lesson?

5. Group cohesion

- how do pupils work together as a group? Do they co-operate or compete?
- do they offer support to other members of the group? Do some members expect more support than others?
- is each pupil allocated a role in the group by his peers? Is this role fixed, or does it vary according to time and mood?
- is there a team atmosphere, or are there several splinter groups?

Pupil attitudes to the teacher

6. Relationship with the teacher

- what is the nature of unsolicited interaction with the teacher? Do they share a joke? Hostility?
- how do they respond to teacher's demands? Do they comply willingly?
- is there any evidence that they respond to the sex of the teacher?
- how do they respond to the teacher disciplining them?

Teaching style

7. Teacher personality

- How does the teacher's character come across?
- What character changes are visible during the lesson and how do the pupils respond?

8. Teaching style

- how can this be summarised? Didactic? Communicative?
- are 'boy-friendly' strategies employed?
- how much TL is used?
- what disciplinary strategies are used? How does (s)he manage the class?

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